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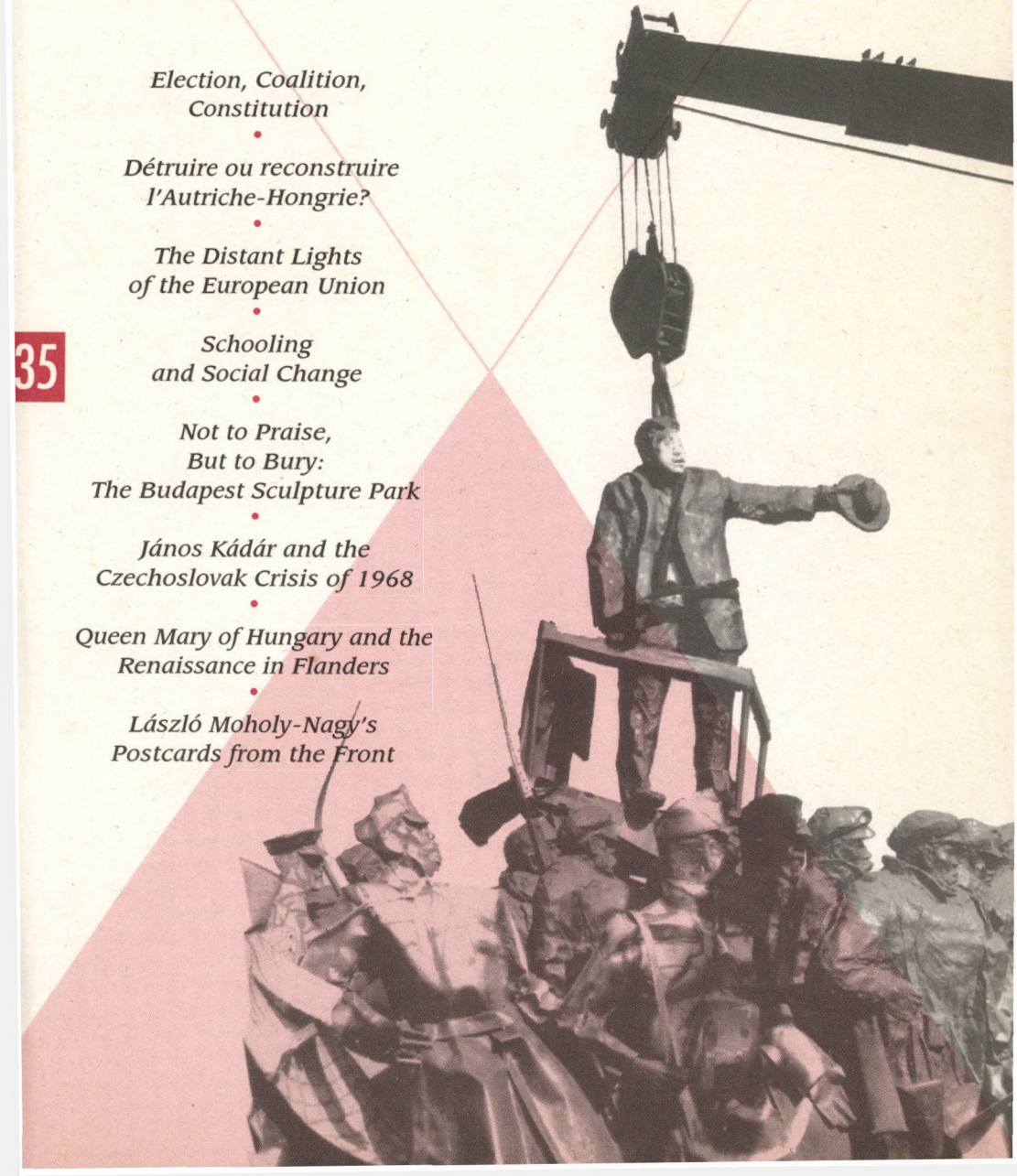

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Andrew Arato

Election, Coalition and Constitution in Hungary

The structure of public law produced by the Hungarian change of system has once again proved adequate for providing a framework for democratic elections, the emergence of a viable system of parties and for government formation. Yet serious shortcomings in this structure were revealed as well by the election results, by the difficulties of forming a coalition (one that did not have to be even formed by classical standards at least) and by the new dilemmas of constitution-making faced by the new government. All these problems are rooted in two features of the existing institutional arrangements: a 1989 electoral rule that has an uncommonly large dimension of disproportionality despite (or because of!) its mixed structure and a narrowly parliamentarist constitutional revision rule inherited from the old regime. The way these two rules interrelate has turned out to be especially burdensome for the political system.

The mixed electoral rule involves competition for 386 seats that divide as follows: **1.** 176 individual seats in two round (first: majority, second: plurality) single district elections **2.** up to 152 seats in proportion to votes in 20 regional constituencies, and **3.** at least 58 seats in a national compensational list. Parties can qualify for the regional and national lists if they attain at least 5 per cent of the vote for all the regional lists taken together ("popular vote"). There are thus 178 seats distributed in individual contests as against 210 given to parties according to proportional voting and compensation. Theoretically therefore the level of disproportionality of this system should be about halfway between a pure proportional and a first past the post, one round, single district Westminster system. Actually, as Arend Lijphart noticed for the 1990 elections, the system is much closer to a Westminster system in its results,

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actually involving in 1990 greater disproportionality than all British elections between 1974 and 1987.[1]

In 1990 the winning MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) gained 42.5 per cent of the seats on the bases of 24.7 per cent of the popular vote. This time the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) received 54 per cent of the seats for 33 per cent of the vote. Thus the disproportionality of the winner's result increased somewhat with the higher popular vote. All other parties, even the second place SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats) received a lower percentage of seats (18 per cent) this time than their popular vote (20 per cent), as against the last time when the second place SZDSZ also received a 2.5 per cent "bonus". In both elections the overall disproportionality is astonishingly the same: there was a 20 per cent overall bonus each time to the strongest parties.

Since the authors of the electoral compromise at the Round Table assumed, however mistakenly, that they were following the German system with only minor modifications, such a level of disproportionality should have surprised them even in 1990. At that time one was tempted to ascribe part of the result at least to the effect of the pull to the first round leader in the second round. Indeed the MDF led in many fewer individual contests after the first round than in the end. But in 1994 the MSZP actually lost its first round lead in 13 or so contests. Thus the index of disproportionality seems to have another possible cause. It has been widely noticed that the Socialist Party did very little campaigning on behalf of its individual candidates, many of whom were totally unknown and yet they defeated popular politicians and leaders of the other parties, including even those of the SZDSZ, which enjoyed significant support among the voters for the socialists. Thus in the presence of the list vote in the first round, voters were inclined to treat their vote for individual candidates as yet another party vote. But party voting in the first round of the individual races had the power, beyond a certain percentage point of support (probably around 30 per cent) to turn a mere plurality into an overwhelming lead. This lead of the MSZP in 162 out of 176 contests was only marginally effected by the contrary trends of the pull to the winner and, this time, fear of the winner. It should be noted that such a voting pattern vitiates at least one of the rationales for having individual districts at all, the supposedly personal, interactive relationship between the deputy and the district. Only 18 holders of individual seats in the old parliament were re-elected, irrespective of service and popularity in local and national polls.

The real aim of course of some of the built-in disproportionality of the mixed system was supposed to be the enhancement of governability. The originally 4

1 ■ "Democratization and Constitutional Choices in Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, 1989-1991", in Gy. Szoboszlai ed. *Flying Blind. Emerging Democracies in East-Central Europe.* Budapest: Hungarian Political Science Association, 1992, p.103.

per cent, 5 per cent after 1993, threshold was to avoid fragmentation and to limit the number of parties. The two-round individual contests are designed to enable relatively few parties to form a coalition. With the constructive no-confidence vote in the house, established through the MDF–SZDSZ agreements of 1990, the electoral law was to provide for an easy to establish and difficult to replace government. Such an arrangement, of course, has severe liabilities when government suffers great and not just temporary loss of support, as happened in Hungary after 1991. But the problem begins with the Hungarian electoral system itself, for this simultaneously represents, and potentially contrasts, procedurally legitimated political strength and actual electoral support. Unlike pure Westminster systems, the list vote or popular vote for parties is not only a statistical but also a public law factum, officially published and used to determine which parties can enter parliament at all. Interestingly the second round popular vote, where the surviving biggest parties (usually only three in each race) are much stronger, has no such role and is rarely mentioned.[2]

But the first round popular vote is almost a referendum on the parties, and it is very widely known that the results of this are greatly distorted by the operation of the electoral system. It should be noted, that all polling in between elections simulates only the totals for the combined lists, the popular vote. Thus one ordinarily measures party support through this particular indicator, and it is embarassing to begin governing with the support of only a minority that is likely to further measurably decrease. From day one of course, after the elections, the losers begin to appeal to the difference between the popular vote and the number of seats each party receives. The winners too act as if they were conscious of the difference. Thus the MDF created in 1990, if not a Grand Coalition with the liberals that would have been most popular, then at least an "overly large" coalition whose three parties received together 43 per cent of the popular vote. It also proceeded to make a political pact with the SZDSZ, the main opposition party, to amend the constitution. The winners in 1994, having received only 33 per cent, acted in an analogous fashion. From even before the second round the MSZP firmly indicated that even if they received an absolute majority of the seats, they would seek coalition with the SZDSZ, with whom, as it happened, they together received 53 per cent of the popular vote.[3]
This was not, as it turned out, only an electoral ploy. The winners of each elec-

2 ■ In fact, in 1994 the MSZP received 45 per cent, the SZDSZ 28.5 per cent of these votes nationally.

3 ■ Actually the MSZP, representing the left of the political spectrum, sought a coalition that would establish an alliance with a different ideological-political bloc, the liberal one. The MDF led coalition drew on a single such bloc only, that of the supposedly conservative, but in fact national Christian right-wing parties. I am convinced that the incredible drop in the popularity of the MDF a few months after the 1990 elections was linked to this narrow choice of a right wing coalition by a party that won the elections from the centre. The MSZP was not interested in repeating that mistake.

tion, whatever they actually say, have shown through their actions that they are troubled by the presence of merely procedural legitimacy for a government that they may wish to form, and the potential weakness of their democratic legitimation if they build a government around the minimum number of seats needed.[4]

The problem of legitimation is greatly exacerbated in relation to constitutional politics, an open terrain in 1994, as it was in 1990. The Hungarian rule of constitutional revision allows two thirds of all of the members of parliament to amend the constitution. In 1990 the overly large coalition built by the MDF on purely ideological grounds controlled only 60 per cent of the seats in parliament. In the light of the large number of non-constitutional laws that, according to the amended constitution of 1989, had to be voted in by two third majorities of those present, the national Christian coalition was actually too narrow. Either to pass such laws or to change their constitutionally anchored two thirds status, additional partners were needed; this was the main reason for the MDF making a political pact with the SZDSZ that involved electing Árpád Göncz President of the Republic with the apparent right (later contested) to participate in naming the heads of radio and television. The agreements led to the second major round of constitutional revisions, and along with the parties of the Round Table of 1989, the MDF–SZDSZ negotiators of April 1989 are the authors of the present Hungarian Constitution. But it should be strongly noted that these two parties, that studiously avoided consulting their own political or ideological allies before making their agreement, together received only 46 per cent of the popular vote, which, however, gave them the necessary two thirds of the parliamentary seats for amending the constitution. They used this power in fact to dramatically change the character of the regime from a parliamentary, in large part consensus democracy, to a *Kanzlerdemokratie* of the German type, involving important shifts in a majoritarian direction. Not unexpectedly, though the validity of its consequences could not be contested, the pact was never recognized as fully legitimate by the other parliamentary parties. Indeed, even the right wing of the MDF, to whom the bulk of the party faithful belonged, also considered the pact from the outset as the original sin of the Antall government, and worked ceaselessly (and in part successfully) to neutralize the concessions that their party was forced to make to the SZDSZ. This state of affairs contributed to the softness of the Hungarian constitutional settlement, and was exacerbated by the (unavoidable) activism and activist claims of the Hungarian Constitutional Court. Thus on the eve of the 1994 election all the parties recognized the need to produce a new constitution.

In this constitutional setting however the results of the first 1994 electoral round

4 ■ I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the motives for coalition building in each case were only those having to do with the problem of democratic legitimation, or even that the legitimation problems of the post-communist MSZP had to do only with the discrepancy between their officially measured popular support and the number of the seats they won.

worked like a bombshell. The right wing parties, learning from their own earlier experience, now faced the following difficult situation. The socialists, whom they feared and against whom government TV carried on an incredibly negative campaign, were on the verge of attaining an absolute majority in parliament. But if they did not succeed in this they would have to form a coalition with the SZDSZ, with whom they were almost certain to then have the two-thirds majority needed to modify the constitution and to pass or change important two-thirds legislation, like media law, electoral law and legislation on local government, requiring likewise a two-thirds majority in parliament. The MSZP was leading in most individual contests, but in the bulk of these the SZDSZ was a strong second and was calling for the support of the voters of the other parties to help stop an overly large socialist victory. However, to the strategists and the publicists of the right, all the way from István Csurka to people on the margins of FIDESZ (the liberal Alliance of Young Democrats, which was still an electoral ally of the SZDSZ) the greater danger was now seen not as the 50 per cent + 1 of parliamentary seats for the socialists, but rather the two thirds + 1 for the MSZP and the SZDSZ together. Since, they reasoned, only a crushing defeat of the SZDSZ could stop them from joining a coalition, the main enemy the right had to concentrate on was now in the liberal centre and not on the left. In their hour of electoral disaster, more and more of the leading right wing politicians hoped for a purely socialist government and even recommended voting socialist where a right wing candidate was weak.[5]

Their secret hope was of course that a weak, and easy to oppose, one party socialist government with built-in legitimation problems would be formed. But they appealed, in my view not altogether hypocritically, to a fear of "constitutional dictatorship", that implied variously that an MSZP–SZDSZ coalition with a two-thirds majority in the house would be able to govern as it pleased, would be able to modify the constitution in a dictatorial manner, or even that it would use its constitutional powers to abrogate a democratic constitution and establish some kind of quasi-authoritarian rule.

In the end, both the fears of the SZDSZ concerning an absolute majority for the socialists, and the fears of the right concerning the formation of a coalition holding a greater than two thirds share of the house materialized. The MSZP faced the

5 ■ We cannot assess the degree of success of this ploy. Contrary to preelection surveys showing the SZDSZ to be more people's second choice than the MSZP, it seems that, among voters who switched to either of these two parties, the MSZP enjoyed a slight advantage. This could have been the effect simply of the greater pull of the bigger winner than that of the smaller winner. In my view, however, it is possible that the effect of the right wing anti-SZDSZ campaign was to inhibit switching from all parties to the SZDSZ to some extent. This may have been especially true of those socialist voters who voted for the party that was perceived as furthest from the ruling coalition, who were strongly for a socialist liberal coalition and who first showed some inclination to switch to the SZDSZ to guarantee such a result.

choice of having a government that was too weak, and having one that was too strong. Not surprisingly they chose the latter. The SZDSZ, on the other hand, could not frustrate the overwhelming coalition expectations of the public, repeatedly measured by various polls, above all on the part of its own voters and the liberal intelligentsia. Neither party could afford to take responsibility for failure to form a coalition; thus one had to offer and the other had to accept negotiations. And when negotiations were started they were fated to succeed for the same reason.

But the negotiations could not ignore the problem of forming a parliamentary majority with 72 per cent of the seats and thus constituent powers. Indeed, they first exacerbated them. The SZDSZ especially faced an uncommonly difficult situation. In ordinary coalitions, when no single partner has the power to govern alone and when each partner's participation is necessary to dispose over the necessary parliamentary seats, the threat of withdrawal is usually sufficient to secure the interests of each party. Given the absolute majority of the MSZP, the SZDSZ could not be protected in this sense. To deal with this problem, the SZDSZ devised, and the MSZP substantially accepted, a complicated system of guarantees on several levels, securing a consensus requirement of the two parties in all major governmental decisions, appointments, as well as on legislation, protecting in addition the ministers and legislative proposals of each party from parliamentary attacks (interpellations, unfriendly amendments) by disgruntled factions and individuals of the other party. These arrangements, while fully published, were merely political in status without any legal machinery of enforcement and involved only voluntary self-limitation on the part of the two coalition parties.[6]

Yet violations, when publicized, could be politically very costly. To avoid such an outcome the partners set up a Coordinating Council of the Coalition, with a strong consensus requirement (each party would have one vote), dealing with disputes over the coalitional arrangements.

If successful, the result of the system of guarantees agreed upon could be unusually strong cooperation between the partners, leading to a unified and effective government of both parties. But it could also yield an overlarge parliamentary force, a gigantic political machine that could reduce all opposition to insignificance. It was an open question what would remain of parliamentarianism in such a setting, where all major discussions would occur within the parliamentary groups of each coalition party, or in the various forums (governmental council, coalitional council, combined meeting of the parliamentary parties) where the two parties alone are represented. This was indeed one of the possibilities that the right-wing parties feared when they campaigned against the danger of "constitutional dictatorship". To deal with this criticism, the coalition agreement proposed

6 ■ *A Magyar Szocialista Párt és a Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége koaliciós megállapodása.* Budapest, June 24, 1994 (ms.) (Coalition Agreement between the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats).

to significantly bolster the opposition. Instead of dividing parliamentary committees in proportion to parliamentary seats, the coalition parties, even before finalizing their own agreement, undertook negotiations with the other four parliamentary parties concerning representation in parliamentary committees. The result, giving the opposition over one third of the membership in six important committees, and parity or near parity in two others, was then incorporated in the coalition agreement. That agreement, and the governmental program based on it, further indicated the coalition's intention to seek wider consensus in relationship to some particularly contentious fundamental legislation, in particular the media law.[7] This was extended when the new government offered six party consultations over the production of a new parliamentary House Rule, the appointments of the new chairmen of radio and TV, and the drafting of the media law.[8]

All the problems of a weak opposition are only exacerbated on the level of constitution-making, because the new coalition is indeed theoretically in a position (because of the inherited revision rule) to unilaterally change the constitution, the electoral law (a "two-thirds" law), and in theory at least to permanently weaken the political chances of today's weak opposition. This is the second meaning of "constitutional dictatorship" that should not, and has not been, simply dismissed. The problem is made worse by the fact that the constitution cannot be simply left as it is. Most obviously, the electoral law and the constitution's rule of revision are both the ultimate source of the dangers to parliamentarianism and constitutional stability, and are rules whose unilateral alteration is likely to give rise to the worst anxieties on the part of the opposition. Yet it remains true that the disproportionality built into the electoral law and the monolithic parliamentary constitutional revision rule, when taken together, potentially allow the constitution to be made or remade by a slim electoral majority, or even a minority. These two rules together can open up all future electoral winners to the charge (and perhaps the temptation?) of "constitutional dictatorship". Thus, at the very least one of these rules, and more likely both, must be changed from the point of view of the requirements of constitutionalism.[9]

7 ■ *A Magyar Köztársaság Kormányának Programja* (Government Programme of the Hungarian Republic). 1994–1998 (draft).

8 ■ This type of consultation seemed to have succeeded in relation to the House Rule, but failed in the case of the appointments of the two media chairmen. In general, six party consultations involve the danger of being used merely to produce the appearance of consensus. But they can also provide opportunities for the opposition parties to make impossible offers simply to have them voted down, so they can cry dictatorship over and over again. In the case of failed consensus, as in the case of the media appointments, only public opinion can decide which of the two negative scenarios actually took place. The fate of the House Rule indicates that neither has to inevitably occur.

9 ■ From the point of view of constitutionalism, it may be satisfactory simply to change the amendment rule. But it should not be forgotten that the electoral law in itself also produced both the necessity for an unusually large coalition and the great difficulties in coalition building.

Moreover, the rule of revision of the constitution must be changed also in order to bring the period of transition in the legal sense to a close. Even László Sólyom, the president of the Constitutional Court, who strongly favours retaining the 1989–1990 constitutional document and its further development mainly through constitutional review by the Court, recognizes the need to create a new rule of revision, in order to put a relative end to parliamentary, normal political constitutional tinkering. He does not recognize, however, that one sitting parliament does not have the legitimacy to stop future parliaments from constitutional politics merely through some tinkering of its own. The process, in other words, must be first formally opened up, so that it can be closed, and the closure itself would require an extraordinary process of constitution-making.

The new coalition is nevertheless not in an easy position to be able to initiate a new and relatively definitive phase of constitution-making. First of all, despite its 72 per cent majority, its electoral support of 52 per cent remains too narrow to establish on its own anything but a winner's constitution. Discussing the Polish case, Wiktor Osiatinsky is quite right to point out that the electoral instruments that give the winning parties a great bonus in seats can be at best justified only from the point of view of governability, but not the needs of constitution-making; since a constitution ought not be merely made by, or be the instrument of, a single government, but should be as far as possible acceptable to all the main political forces.[10]

Both the MSZP and the SZDSZ have special difficulties in sponsoring a new constitution. The legal forerunner of the MSZP imposed one constitution on the country, and the current socialists are nervous about that historical precedent. They certainly want to avoid all appearance of sponsoring, and especially forcing through, yet another change of system on the legal level. But the SZDSZ too wishes to fight against any such appearance. Unfortunately, it was only relatively late between the two electoral rounds, that its leaders did in the end produce the right answer to the charge of a constitutional dictatorship in preparation. They rightly maintained that as one of the main authors of the new legal order they should be seen as the guardians of its main constituents. This made it more difficult to call for constitution-making after the elections.

Nevertheless, even before the elections there was some consensus on the fact that the constitution must be at the very least redrafted in order to deal with a whole range of problems. The most important of these was to clarify the role of the president, to reduce somewhat the powers of the constitutional court and to redefine the line of authority of the public prosecutor.[11] Finally, if the

10 ■ "Poland's Constitutional Ordeal." *East European Constitutional Review,* Spring 1994, v.3, no. 2, p. 32.

11 ■ See *Jogállam*, 1994, No. 2 for the range of expert opinion.

Constitutional Court was to continue building a tradition of constitutionalism in the strong sense through its interpretations, the democratic legitimacy of the document as a whole had to be shored up to avoid a recurrent conflict between democracy and constitutionalism. Thus, the new coalition ought not simply to run away from these challenges merely because it has the power to redress them all alone. Indeed, one important justification for building the coalition at all is that it has the opportunity to bring the period of constitutional transition to a close by passing a coherent set of laws (the constitution, the media law, the electoral law) that would establish the liberal and democratic character of the new system more securely than the legal arrangements between 1990 and 1994.

This opportunity must be used wisely if its results are to have any legitimacy and stability. The coalition agreement (and the slightly different governmental programme) in fact postulate the following important points pertaining to constitutional politics:

1 ■ The parties of the coalition intend to create a new constitution, but also to preserve the main features of the existing public law structure.
2 ■ They wish to elect a 27 member parliamentary committee to draft the new document, under the Minister of Justice, giving the MSZP 10 (less than 50 per cent), the SZDSZ 5, and the opposition parties 10 (more than 33 per cent) of the seats.
3 ■ They propose a popular ratification of the new constitution by August 1995 (government statement: second half of 1995) and
4 ■ (in the governmental statement) a wide ranging professional and public discussion as part of the process.
5 ■ They envision several areas for new constitutional regulation including **a)** the constitutional guarantee of judicial independence by setting up a National Judiciary Council exercising the present prerogatives of the Ministry of Justice with respect to the courts; **b)** the redefinition of the office of the Chief Public Prosecutor; and **c)** the reform of the structure of local government.
6 ■ They accept a slight trimming of the functions of the Constitutional Court, but only in accordance with its own wishes.
7 ■ They specifically recommend the adoption of a new constitutional amendment rule, one that requires a second parliamentary session to ratify the amendment(s) made by the previous one.
8 ■ Finally, outside the constitutional draft strictly speaking, they foresee a new electoral law, abolishing the second electoral round, keeping a mixed system but taking the principle of proportionality into account.

These points can be best interpreted in terms of a set of principles, that in turn should serve the coalition well in dealing with yet unexpected but certainly unavoidable difficulties in constitution-making they will have to confront. It is therefore worthwhile to articulate these:

i The principle of consensus: although the coalition could make a constitution alone, it prefers to include as many of the opposition parties in the process as possible. It is willing to expose itself even to the risk that some of the other parties might use the process to denounce the coalition, to repeat their charge of dictatorship. However, the coalition cannot make the whole process hostage to the politics of one or two opposition parties.

ii The principle of the plurality of democracies: while in such an ideologically divided society the coalition is not going to expose the system to the possible conflict of parliament and a specially elected constitutional assembly, the decision concerning the constitution will not be restricted to the parliament it will regulate. The coalition will thus expose, in line with the requirement of the law on referenda (1989. XVII. par.7), the new or redrafted constitution to a popular referendum.

iii The principle of publicity: while the coalition has the power and technical expertise to enact a new constitution very early, respecting the role of a full public discussion, it establishes an adequate time frame for relevant publications, expert conferences and public fora.

iv The principle of the veil of ignorance: in order to avoid making the constitution hostage to the discussions of the next electoral campaign, and to normal politics, the constitution will have to be submitted to popular ratification well before the next elections. Thus the whole process has to adhere to an orderly schedule, its conclusion must not take place either too early or too late.

v Finally, the principle of continuity: having characterized the whole Hungarian system change, the principle of radical continuity must now be upheld on both the procedural and substantive level. Concerning procedures, the existing rule of revision must be used once more, and only once more, to enact the new procedure of making the new constitution, involving perhaps the new committee structure, and certainly the desired structure of parliamentary voting, as well as popular ratification currently required only by ordinary statute. Concerning substance, the new constitution-makers are likely to go beyond a mere declaration of wishing to maintain the main constituents of the current public law system. If they are to gain the support of at least one opposition party for the new document, they would do well to preserve the content and even the structure of the inherited constitution as far as possible. This should be possible, because while there is a need for a new constituent process, the document itself only needs serious redrafting according to the points stressed in the current professional consensus.

Of course there will be constitutional change, as the documents reveal. But where changes are necessary, the coalition should indeed strive for maximum possible consensus. This will be certainly possible for example with respect to a partial reduction of the powers of the Constitutional Court, which is to be done according to principles sponsored by the Court itself. Consensus should also be possible where one can smoothly return to the original principle that informed

the making of a rule; a case here would be the electoral rule where the enactment of a two-vote compensational 5 per cent threshold German system would involve sufficient continuities with the present mixed system, and yet remedy difficulties that represent potential dangers to all of the parties. But where consensus is not possible and yet change is still highly desirable, the parties of the coalition would do well to adhere to principles that they defended when in opposition, a condition inevitably more sensitive to the needs of constitutionalism than being parts of the new and rather overwhelming parliamentary majority. Such might be the case in relationship to the media law, the reform of the judicial system, and the reform of local governmental organization, where the new government wishes to abolish the powers of the Republican Commissioners established by the previous one.

Only if these principles are more or less followed can there be a chance of a general agreement regarding the most fundamental point: the closing of the constituent process through establishing a new rule of revision that will make future constitutional politics more democratic, less monolithic and yet constitutional change more difficult. The worst combination to be avoided would be to unilaterally impose a substantially new constitution along with an attempt to make future constitutional change next to impossible. I am convinced, however, that the present coalition will build on the inherited method of continuity and negotiation among diverse forces, rather than give in to the old European temptation of claiming unlimited constituent powers. ❧

Zsuzsa Takács

The Perennial Lament

Az évezredes jajszó

There will be those among you who will not be able to look
at a woman again, the mere look of the wound, the smell,
if you survive it at all, will be enough,
the need to repeat the act will forestall you,
the broken spines, the sobbing which turns
suddenly to a scream you will hear
as if it had a will of its own.
Oh that perennial lament!
Beg to report, we have ripped off her shirt!
Beg to report, we have thrown her on the ground!
She was wailing like a broken alarm.
Beg to report we made her lie on the door we smashed down
because she had tried to escape. Beg to report,
we could see she was old. We saw she was ill.
We saw she was a child. Beg to report,
we had earned the exceptional licence,
each and every one who was there!
But the worst will be to do it again,
to go into battle for the sake of a woman.
To blaze and arrive at the point
and then to hear something whispering:
Let there be no witnesses! And our palm slides across
the lips opened to cry.
Whatever you want, my love, only don't scream!
Whatever you want, only cover yourself,
from now on please wait for me
in a darkened room! Beg to report,
we have thrown her on the ground and have raped her!
Beg to report I threw her on the ground and I raped her!

Translated by George Szirtes

Zsuzsa Takács

has published seven volumes of poems, including one for children, and a translation of the complete poetry and selected prose of St. John of the Cross. This poem was taken from Szarajevo, *an anthology of new writing, published in Budapest in 1994.*

Péter Nádas

Blown Away

(Short story)

In early January, when the shop reopened, only a few items were on the shelves. But there was more stuff in the large cartons that stood behind the counter. These were being unpacked now. Everything seemed new, clean, bright, fragrant. It had been snowing steadily for days. In the mirrors, on the ceiling, the yellow glow of the store's recessed lights seemed to clash, with all that white. A young woman stood on a ladder, while an older one, the sleeve of her white smock rolled up to her elbow, was handing her bottles of liquor. Only my eyes took note of the fact that this older woman was one of those who had been branded. Just inside the curve of her elbow, on her forearm, was her number, tattooed in blue ink. Actually, it began with a letter, which was followed by a short line, sort of a dash, then the number itself, perhaps six digits in all. Normally, you saw such tattoos only when men wore short-sleeved shirts and women were in sleeveless summer dresses. A stranger's bare arm would reach for the leather strap in a streetcar, grab hold, and then you'd see it. Some people had them removed surgically, but then the skin graft itself, the wrinkled or discolored scar tissue became the distinguishing mark. The streetcar would rumble along, generating a pleasant breeze, and whoever noticed such an arm, *if* they noticed it, would rather stare out the open window, at streets baking in the summer heat. I know I did. Years later, the crippled and maimed war veterans also began to disappear from the city, they must have died out. At one point, I don't know just when, they even stopped marking special seats for them on the streetcars. But back then there were still quite a lot of them around. Some had an arm missing, others a leg. They would use safety pins to fasten their trouser legs or shirt sleeves, and thus cover the place

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Péter Nádas's
Egy családregény vége
(The End of a Family Saga) has appeared in nine languages. After its great success in Germany, Emlékiratok könyve
(Book of Memories) will be published next year by Farrar, Strauss & Giroux. This short story, set in the late October days of 1956, was taken from Szarajevo, *an anthology of new writing, published in Budapest, 1994.*

where limbs should have been; or they'd let the sleeves dangle freely over the stumps. Jacket sleeves were pinned inside jacket pockets. There were peg legs properly shod; crutches strapped to the stump of an arm or to the hip. And scars, marks, holes, disfigurement; traces of burns and frostbites on horrifying faces. None of this required any explanation, though I never could decide what was more considerate: to look as if there was nothing to see, or to quickly turn away. I'd rather do the latter. Either way, the shame lingered, for I could never look, or turn away, without them noticing. They knew well why I had turned, or why I'd made believe there was nothing to look at. In our neighborhood you performed this pathetic little ritual rather frequently. Cold indifference offends. But my sympathy wasn't much good either, because my revulsion, my disgust were even stronger. The most I could bring myself to do was turn away slowly.

Almost every morning I saw a man who had been reduced to a mere torso. He propelled himself between people's feet on a wheeled wooden platform. My own father would not have been any older if—even in such a state—he had survived. The man rolled out of Szófia utca and braked his vehicle with his two hands, which were swathed in heavy leather gloves. In front of the large pharmacy the sidewalk slanted quite a bit. I had no idea where he was coming from. Most people were in a hurry, of course. He'd repeat the same two phrases each time. And always address a man. He would wait for his chance. He could get that contraption to come thumping down from the sidewalk, but on the other side of the street he needed help with it. First he'd swing forward, raise himself on his two fists and stay that way, almost allowing that dolly of his to slip out from under him and tip over the sidewalk. But then with another push he would yank his truncated limbs back on the board, and with his gloved hands quickly slow it down, to keep it from rolling out into the street. What had remained of his body was clean, sinewy, nice. It probably wasn't just due to the physical exertion, but sweat poured from his forehead and neck. A handsome face looked up at passers-by—on his moist forehead his long, smooth, dark-brown hair had got all matted—and asked that he be helped back on the sidewalk. His voice remained clear, steady: "I will only need assistance on the other side, if you wouldn't mind. An unfortunate war veteran appreciates your kindness." The person to whom these words were addressed would become flustered, not knowing just what he was supposed to do. But the miserable creature wouldn't say another word. He swung forward, rose, bounced back, slowed down in such quick succession that whoever saw him do it for the first time could hardly follow the precisely timed sequence.

Seeing him drive himself across the street, the helper would follow him rather helplessly. I saw him many times myself, and followed him. I wanted to know where he was going.

The men who were able to walk on their own two feet were overcome with shame. And a kind of childish eagerness. The same inexplicable shame marked

their faces, their whole demeanor. If only they didn't have to follow an athlete's torso with their healthy feet. Maybe then their backs wouldn't sag quite as much. The rolling board made an infernal racket as it bumped and bounced and clattered on the uneven cobblestones. Cars had to stop. When the torso reached the other side, it bent forward, the two gloved hands propped up against the sidewalk, the shoulder muscles tense, and then, as though completing an exercise on the parallel bars, he swung himself quite gracefully up on the sidewalk, keeping his body suspended. The man helping him just had to slide the board under the two stumps. All this was clear enough, no words, no special instructions were needed. But the men walking on their own two feet wanted to do something more, something that required strength and skill. They looked as if they were really trying to help. However, the torso wanted nothing else from them. And as he rolled away between scurrying feet, they were left there, ungratified, frustrated. I never did find out where he was going.

And then there was this walking, talking third-degree burn. Judging from her fine clothes, graceful movements, and refined vocabulary, she was a youngish lady. Under the huge hats she wore there was not a single lock or strand of hair. The turned-down rim of her hat covered her forehead and threw a shadow where her face should have been. On her forehead there was this altogether unlikely dent, as if the spot where the frontal and cranial bones fused had been smashed, flattened, even though the skin itself showed no trace of injury. In fact, her sunken forehead was the only place where the skin was more or less unscathed. Her face was full of scars, cuts, odd creases, suture marks. She had no nose, and no lips either. A lipless slit was all she had, and above it two dark holes. She wore dresses with high, closed collars, and her silk scarves were wrapped tight around her neck. But if her scarf came a little loose, you could see that her neck had suffered burns too. Her whole body must have been covered with burns. She wore suede gloves and dark, thick stockings. Her breathing had an odd wheeze to it, the sounds came from her throat, from the hollow of her mouth, as if she were unable to put her words into final form. They never did became real words, only her intonation suggested their meaning. If I ended up standing next to her in a line, I had to pretend I had important business elsewhere. At such close range I couldn't stand listening to those throaty, muzzy sounds, they hurt my ear, though it was my heart that was ready to burst. But that I couldn't admit to her. Then again, how could somebody else's heartache have helped her? Others were rather more indifferent, or more considerate, and she probably got used to this unemotional kind of solicitude. But you could be sure of this only if she had had a face with which to express her feelings. Otherwise she spoke like a self-assured lady who knew how to handle tradespeople.

"Any roquefort left? If not, then let me have some bologna, but do slice it thin. No, not from that, from the one over there, yes how very kind of you. And you will make sure it won't be more."

The last time I saw her was the day our store had run out of bread. They didn't let you inside, they sold whatever they still had from a table they'd set up to block the open door. The overnight-curfew lasted until eight in the morning, and if you didn't queue up at dawn, you were out of luck. The line on the sidewalk stretched quite far. There were reports on the radio almost every hour that the fighting had ended and a ceasefire was in effect. But even if the shooting did stop in one section of the city, it flared up in another, and before long it picked up everywhere. What's more, this had been going on for three days, and few people had anything by way of reserves. I still can't understand the general attitude, though. It's no doubt important that people have bread, but they have to be alive to eat it. Yet, that's not how we thought then. There was always something we needed a fresh supply of, everybody was out searching, as if that was the most important thing, to find that one item.

The store manager called out in the early-morning darkness that all the bread was gone, he would not get another delivery that day, the bakery on Király utca was ordered by the authorities to resupply the hospitals. A few people yelled back: He could have told them earlier. Only those waiting for sugar, flour, oil or farina should stay, the man said. He had nothing else in stock. No, madam, there was no salt, it was no use asking. No yeast, no matches, either. But over at Glázner's they'll be baking all day, there should be enough for everybody. As soon as he said this, the line began to dwindle.

She was there that morning, too, wearing a short Persian lamb coat, long pants and boots, and explaining something to the person next to her. So we all had to adjourn to Glázner's on Saint Stephen Boulevard. This sort of thing happened a lot during those days, but nobody seemed to mind moving on. In fact, it wasn't thought to be a good idea to stay in one place too long. And sometimes you didn't need an official announcement—word simply got around that at another location there were still things to be had. And then small bands of anxious shoppers would begin their trek toward yet another destination. Nobody complained. True, nobody knew what to expect. Was the next place going to be less safe? Was any location really safe? You simply succumbed to need, that's what caused your anxiety. So you moved on. But sometimes you couldn't get to the next place, not even by taking long detours, because of the fighting. Or you did get there, only to find out that the store was closed, or it had never opened, or had been reduced to rubble in the meantime. But something would always turn up. And in the hope of this something, everyone worked out his private strategy. They knew which roads to take and which ones to avoid. It wasn't wise to go off on your own, though. That way you didn't get to hear the latest news. But sticking too close to crowds also had its dangers. Things changed constantly. So you navigated between crowds that were either dispersing or becoming more dense. Daylight was not much better than these foggy, early morning hours. It looked as if everyone was following their own instinct, but in reality they were all very

much aware of what the others were doing. Maybe they did know better. And this odd feeling, which in more peaceful times may have alienated them from one another, made them stick together more. Yet this togetherness didn't feel right either. It made everybody think that only *they* knew what was best for them, all the others did was run off at the mouth, it might just make more sense to go it alone. For a while you could be reasonably sure of yourself, and know, too, that others viewed the same uncertainties very differently. But when it came to deciding, for instance, whether to cross an open square or choose a different route, you just couldn't make up your mind alone.

And the real danger spots weren't even where the skirmishes raged on without a letup. If shots were fired at more or less the same height, or if we could tell where they were coming from, where they were aimed, then we could dodge them at least, or cling to a piece of railing or an overturned steetcar, and wait for a pause between two bursts and bend down and make a dash for it. That is what the others were doing, too. Of course, you had to count on stray bullets. When just about everyone made it across, somebody would get hit. And the victim would stay on the roadway, unless somebody was willing to creep back and pull him out from under a hail of bullets. And then there he was, someone nobody knew, either injured or already dead. By then there was no more milk anywhere. One woman's milk can was hit by a flying bullet. This happened during the day. Feeble sunlight cut through a light autumn fog. The woman was running towards us from the other side of the street, while a few of us were still waiting for the right moment to dash across. At such moments, faces got all twisted, mouths stayed wide open, eyes narrowed to slits. As if at once two sentences were on everybody's lips: "All right, *now*." and "Good, I made it." When the woman's can was hit, she stopped, her face frozen in disbelief. The milk poured out of the can in two gushing streams. Which meant that somewhere around there, milk *was* being sold. Or had been. And the spilled milk seemed more important than anything else. She didn't even duck, but in her fury slammed the can against the ground. Three times, four times, without letting go of the handle. The others, too, hollered for a while, but it didn't change anything.

What remains even more memorable is the quiet. An inert square, a silent intersection, where everything is ominously still. Locked doors, closed shutters. Lightness or dark, it doesn't seem to matter; not even footsteps can disturb such silence. Yet deep inside it something stirs and fills the air. That was just the kind of unnerving dawn that greeted us around the Western Station. No light anywhere, not behind the windows, not on the street—no sound, no movement of any kind. It was chilly and foggy, you felt it on your skin, in your nostrils. But there was nothing to see or hear, not there, not yet. Perhaps cats or rats have such presentiment. The square was still far away, you could just about make out the heavily damaged railroad station towers against a still dark sky. Up to this point we'd been like a bunch of spirited and noisy tourists. But there was no

question that now we'd have to be quiet and keep away from the square. Afterwards all we could hear was the shuffle of our receding footsteps. It rebounded from the walls of apartment buildings. We knew what we were doing, like cats and rats. It looked from here as if the upper end of Podmaniczky utca was open. We'd seen others turn in, so it seemed like a safe enough crossing point. But we didn't walk together, each of us was on his own. You told yourself: you'll get to Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út somehow. And didn't even ask: and then what? All you saw before you was Kálmán utca, where the trolleys used to run—that's the street you had to reach first. If you were calculating probabilities, weighing possibilities, your only concern was the next step. Just how you were going to get there didn't interest you, only the very next step. Not before or since then have I felt the city to be so much a part of me. One pressing need highlighted a single spot for me, and with that my situation was placed under microscopic scrutiny. It was as if I saw right away where everything was, and what sort of landmarks and hiding places and natural defenses—what dangers—I could count on or anticipate. I was like an animal that knows every trail and track. Right now it was Kálmán utca, and after that it would be another street, though I knew I mustn't get too close to the Ministry of Defense building or the Parliament. Alkotmány utca would pose a problem because it was so wide; and crossing the Boulevard might be an even bigger problem. But right now only Kálmán utca was under a magnifying lens; I didn't ask myself what I would do once I'd made it there. Something was bound to happen, and then again, something else might, or maybe nothing at all. Somewhere in the distance you heard the rattle of machine guns. But you heard that rattle everywhere—nearby, a little farther away, in the remote distance. It became dangerous only when you heard it echo right in your own street. Then it was like being inside a sack, with you having to find a way to climb out. But you never could figure out such a thing beforehand.

While I kept walking, somebody stopped me to ask what's up. There's bread at Glázner's, I said. Just then the whole street had a respite. People appeared in several doorways. Rebels, too, bringing stuff out, carrying things back in. Lights went on in the apartments upstairs. The autumnal leaves had changed color, but the boughs were still full. This and all those lights made it seem as if this whole thing had just about run its course. Streets heaving a sigh of relief always looked this way, though now this one kept taking quick, sharp breaths, for nobody really knew how long the respite would last. It was probably a caretaker's helper who'd stopped me before. From a well-lighted window just overhead, a woman called out to him: "Will you be a dear, Stevie, and turn on the water for us?" He was carrying a box of ammunition on his shoulder. "Fuck you, man, you'll never get through here. Don't you see what's happening?" Sure I did; if he said so. I didn't think his contempt was entirely unjustified. Perhaps it wasn't even contempt. Maybe all he meant to say was that I was a stupid civilian. Mind you, it wasn't that hard to get hold of a gun. I had seen people on trucks handing them out to all comers.

It wasn't fear that stopped me from grabbing one. I can't even say that I objected to all the shooting. On the contrary, I approved. I couldn't imagine it happening any other way. Justice was done. And where there was shooting, there were bound to be deaths. But my job now was to find bread. And other stuff, too. "We already turned it on, miss. You just go ahead and try it." It was at the next intersection where I learned, from somebody else, that the Russians had pulled as far back as the Basilica. And had brought out their heavy guns. But the Western Station was still in rebel hands. Which meant it was a good place to cut across. What you didn't know was when it would start up again. On the corner there was a large photography studio. And in front of its shattered window, a bunch of familiar faces. Broken glass crunched under our feet. Somebody had better start moving, we all thought, but no one could say this out loud. Everyone was privy to some piece of new information, and therefore committed to this or that course of action. An interminable discussion ensued, everybody had his say, though it was not all that interesting. The only nice thing about it was that in this unfamiliar neighborhood, you got to see familiar faces. People looked at one another in the dark, they spoke their mind, they kept gesturing with their hand. Still, there were those who didn't say a word, who only listened, and it was mostly these people who later would lose their patience. Which was bad. You had to decide, after all, whom to side with, which faction to join. Either way, it was bad. In the end, everyone was waiting for his turn, only no one wanted to go first.

Strung over the deserted street, a single crippled arc light still burned. The trolley bus's overhead lines fell on the cable, the weight shifted the lamp's dish, the glass cover broke, but the light itself worked. In between piles of ripped-up paving stones there were dead bodies. On the corner of Kálmán utca smoke rose from a burnt-out tank on the sidewalk. From a distance it looked like steam. Perhaps the tank caught fire as it tried to avoid the pile of stones. Skidding out of control, it ran up the sidewalk, hit a tree, its limbs came crashing down, and then both tree and tank went up in flames. The charred branches stuck out of the wreck like horns. A single collapsed wall was all that remained of a newspaper kiosk. The foggy, early-morning air cradled a few sheets of newsprint. Nothing else stirred. Now and then the sheets of newspaper rose in the air, were wafted along, then deposited.

Even at this point I could see her. But only her eyes. Her face was shielded by her scarf. On this particular morning she wore a turban instead of a hat, and the color and pattern of her turban matched the cashmere scarf perfectly. It was not unusual to see such fineries, or even a fur coat, during those few days. People pulled out many things which earlier they would not have dreamed of putting on. As if it were a holiday of some kind, though in truth, these articles of clothing hardly suited the occasion. She held her shopping basket in her arm the way she always did—as though she'd just run down to do some last-minute shopping. And while the others were still busy conferring and weighing alternatives,

she apparently whispered something from behind her scarf to the man standing next to her, who didn't seem to understand. This man was wearing riding boots, which, too, were things one hadn't seen much of in recent years. Then she started walking, and it looked as if the man was going to go after her. Broken glass and other debris crunched under their feet in the continuing stillness. But then the man thought better of it; he wasn't going to follow her, which didn't seem to bother the woman. She stepped off the curb and continued walking, shopping basket in hand. She wasn't running or hurrying, she didn't even lean forward very much as she walked. She was simply someone going shopping. The man stayed in the middle of the sidewalk, which wasn't too smart of him. In those days the sidewalk at this spot jutted out in a salient. He stood there, as though on a spit of land, facing a sea of danger. He should have either turned around or walked on. We also watched the woman, anxious to see what'll happen to her. She got to the arc light all right. It would be harder after that, on account of the corpses and the ripped-up paving stones. The streetcar tracks protruded from the exposed roadbed like two lifeless spines. The city then was full of objects that had lost their function, their reason for being. But nothing happened. She walked between the two tracks where there were gaping holes now, regular trenches. She could easily fall into one. But the dark depths were still, we heard nothing suspicious. At least twenty of us were waiting at the corner for the final outcome. At such moments you didn't hear the person breathing next to you, or if you did, you were oblivious to it. When she got past the tracks, she stepped out of the patch of light, though we could still see her running. If she got that far, let her not be cut down. These were times when it was so easy to understand what people did, and why. When she reappeared, she stood in front of a house, on the other side.

I saw her even at Glázner's, later on. It was light by then. She had to have been there for some time, because she'd already joined the line. I took one look at this line and felt like giving up. But then what would I do for bread? Whenever you saw a long line, you tried to figure out what your chances were. But this time all figuring seemed futile. And I even dawdled, by walking ahead, as far as Katona József utca, to see if the situation was really that bad. In the meantime, of course, new people had joined the line. But others wavered, too. Not believing their eyes, they also went ahead to check, or tried to size things up from a distance. But the more you thought about it, the worse your chances got, because other people took the place that technically, on the basis of time of arrival, belonged to you. The line spilled out of Fürst Sándor utca, its fringes coming to an end on the Boulevard. That was to be my place on a line that wound massively around an entire city block, all along Sallai Imre utca, and then curved back onto the Boulevard and the bakery's main entrance. And this line did not move an iota, for the simple reason that there was no fresh bread, and no way of knowing when the next batch would come out of the ovens. There were people who'd

brought chairs or stools with them; others just stood and shuffled their cold feet, or leaned their back against the masonry. Either I gave up or I didn't. No more hesitation. But as I dragged myself back to the end of the line, it occurred to me to walk all the way to Petneházy utca, where the central bakery was. Not that I had any sort of premonition then.

On the whole, things looked calm here, which may have been the main reason why I didn't go off on my own. I took my place at the end of the line. There was no more room on the sidewalk. Those who came after me had to stand in the intersection. We could always creep up just a little. Which didn't mean that they'd finally begun serving people inside the shop—it was quiet impatience that closed up the ranks. A half hour or so passed, after which things began moving inside; and pretty soon there was a stir outside as well. First, just restlessness, some quiet grumbling, a little shoving. Everybody would have loved to press forward, but there was no room. "Just where would you want me to move, Madam?" In such a situation everyone has to say something. "Just a minute, my good man, just one minue." Then, the helpless shuffle of feet, the rumble of irritability, the first solitary shouts. People given to such outbursts are held in contempt by the crowd, and rightly so. In order to squeeze your way into the store, you must make room for the happy few who are on their way out with their fresh loaves.

Whoever doesn't understand the psychology of waiting might think that nothing's more natural than letting these people pass—it's in your best interest to do so, after all. If people aren't allowed out, no one'll be able to go in. But the fact is that people in such circumstances have to contend with several different pressures at once. And no matter how reasonable or good-natured a person may be, in a crowd he will not be able to yield to all of these pressures. His common sense and his sense of justice will inevitably clash with his sense of urgency, and past a certain point he will not be in control of his conflicting impulses. His common sense will become especially vulnerable. Let's just imagine that someone at the back of the line has an urge to move forward, even though he has no idea what's going on way ahead of him. He may move up just a little, no more than an inch or two, yet already tensions flare. Instinctively, or on purpose, he's slouched forward. But if he didn't, someone else would, or he'd be irritably nudged along by the others. And if that happened, his sense of justice would surely suffer. But however much this person may cherish his common sense or his sense of justice, he couldn't possibly resist the will of so many people bearing down on him—right now he'd buckle under his own body weight. Nevertheless, for a brief moment everyone is anxious for him to stand fast and push back, for people *are* for the most part well-meaning and reasonable, yet no one can ignore the insidious machinations of their own animal selfishness. It's not their fault, they will say, that this person is simply too weak to get that pushy creep off his back. In any case, if people are not equal in strength, not equally capable of resisting the pressure that's on them, then the tiny space I

gain by virtue of my own strength will surely be filled by the weak ones, or invaded by the petty schemers, who'll then manage to shove me aside.

There are those who wait for just such a moment. For needless to say, physical strength is not the only thing that varies in people—mental fortitude and understanding are also apportioned unevenly. So there are those who will valiantly put up with the massive weight on their back, and will even have the stamina to withstand the pressure, but all they really want is to keep others from obtaining what they would like for themselves. And this desire for a slight advantage can be so easily justified. This one's been standing here for ten hours. It's cold. He simply must go to the bathroom. And that one's child hasn't had a bite to eat in two days. If she doesn't make it into the store, or if the next batch of bread is gone before her turn, it means another one-hour wait, and that's more than she can take. Perhaps she is right, it *is* more than they can take. They have high blood pressure, cancer, heart trouble. And what if they run out of flour in there? Or if the bakery gets hit? Or if these crazy people trample them to death? Common sense hasn't got a chance, everyone can see that. There is always someone who still clings to his sense of justice. Although the only thing he really wants by now is to be treated justly by others. Everyone roars; everyone screams. He can't help himself and screams along with them. Even those who do not open their mouths scream. There are those who knew the bitter truth all along and now let it all out. And those who are shocked to learn that people can act this way and who now likewise proclaim their discovery. And those who do not yet know that the neighbor with whom they've just had a friendly chat is in fact a maniac. And there are also those who are pressed against the plate-glass window; who are pushed out of the line; who are kicked and stepped on. There are children and there are old people. Those who desperately try to leave the store, and those who accidentally get pushed inside. The experienced hysterics and the ones who really are gasping for air. And there are many who still don't believe that something like this can actually happen to them. It's something inside them, their soul, that screams. And though no sound may come out of their mouths, they are shaken by a strange fever, stirred by other people's screams. A fine membrane ruptures inside.

I must have been screaming, too; just about everybody was. When this happens, nothing can help except a moment of grace, a stroke of luck, an accident. Nobody feels responsible any more for what they do. Should they come out of this unharmed, they wouldn't know whom to be grateful to. But how odd that even a violent commotion in a crowd can quickly quiet down. I still don't know what happened; but at least the store windows weren't smashed in. Lifting their loaves over their heads, the first people managed to fight their way through the crowd. The human mass clogged the entrance, it wouldn't budge, yet they squeezed through. All you saw were lurching shoulders, colliding backs. At such moments people are faceless; memory has little to preserve. I saw it all. I stood

no more than thirty feet away, yet I don't know what really happened. Backs, shoulders, the white blur of faces. My hearing remembers, though. Above the throng ringing the entrance, frantic screams cleaved the air. We, however, who stood at the very end of that twisting, block-long line (and thus were only about thirty feet from the spot where at any moment irremediable disaster could have struck), responded by merely shouting. Hoping that these shouts would remind the screamers that a modicum of common sense remained, all was not lost. They could still stop. Or do this some other way. The shouts were meant simply to force back the screams, yet there was anger in the shouts, the anger of frustrated self-interest. After all, if something irrevocable happened up there, then I'd end up with no bread back here. All along the line, as far as the eye could see, there was commotion, unrest. People stopped resting their backs against the side of buildings, they got up from their chairs and stools. Still not knowing for sure what was going on, they jostled and clamored, and were ready to press forward. Whatever happened, happened then, in that confused hubbub, amidst angry shouts and hysterical screams, in the air, where polar opposites: helplessness and willfulness collided head-on.

Just when the first group of lucky breadwinners managed finally to squeeze through the door, and stood there dazed, happy, some choosing to take off in a hurry, afraid that someone may actually snatch the prize out of their hands—just then, the jolting, nerve-racking uproar reached its climax. This was it. Nothing could be louder. They all saw these people come out, and they all wanted to take their place. Going as far as stopping others from leaving the store. Molten lava might feel this way when it has to crack the earth's crust. Or the crust itself, when it tries to hold out around the cracks but then caves in. The pressure inside became simply intolerable, without significantly weakening the pressure outside. The loaves exhaled a hot, heady fragrance. And naturally, those still inside, thinking that the gods must love them to be bestowing these loaves, were most eager to break out. While those trying to fight their way in saw their whole life now as a tremulous uncertainty. The ones elbowing their way in were sure they were doing it for the bread—while those on their way out were defending their lives along with their still hot loaves. Nothing got resolved, of course, but the screams and shouts abated somewhat. The line began to move, though this didn't lessen the confusion, it just turned it into an indignant bustle. No one screamed any more, but everyone argued and pleaded and cursed. We crept forward slowly. And in the soles of our feet felt nascent hope.

I could see her even then—her turban, the uncertain outline of her charred face. The sun came out and we moved forward rather briskly. The sunlight warmed us, we could breathe in the smell of the nearby river—it mixed agreeably with the scent of fresh-baked bread. Nobody talked about what had just happened, or what could have happened. But then, it really was nothing. And if we kept up this pace, we'd have our bread in no time. In a matter of minutes we

were at the corner of Fürst Sándor utca. Happy shoppers were coming out of the bakery again. We moved steadily along, and kept a sharp eye on each other's shuffling feet. At this point you realized that your situation had changed significantly. You were no longer stuck at the end of the line, you were on your way. And you watched, lest somebody pulled a fast one on you—and made sure others wouldn't get the same impression about you. The line is moving, your antennae are up and finely tuned, you are ready to pounce. Everyone is pushing for some advantage, a half-inch lead, if nothing else, just as long as the other guy is left behind. It's as though, in the name of common decency, you are always reining in the other guy, except that the reins are held by him. People hold back in others their own greed. If you can't have the upper hand, you should at least make sure you don't lose out. When the line starts moving, there is no time to argue, and when it comes to a stop again, it's too late to turn things to your own advantage. It has to be done now. That half-inch lead must be grabbed right now. And it has to appear as though the other guy's slowness or clumsiness—and not your despicable selfishness—is responsible for that lead. By the time we reached the corner of Katona József utca, the line had stopped moving. The narrow street was still dark and cool. A bit of sunlight seeped through between the rooftops, but it penetrated only the tiny side street that connects Fürst Sándor utca and Pozsonyi út.

The moment the line stops moving can be amazing. Everybody has to admit that for all their watchfulness they did not end up with the same people who were there when the procession began—the lineup is different. You made every attempt to ensure that things wouldn't change, yet they did. Familiar coats and familiar faces have turned into enemies simply because they somehow ended up ahead of you. Any moment now you'll have to team up with strangers. It will be a bitter moment. Quarrels can break out at such moments. Which may degenerate into fist fights. Or it may suddenly turn quiet, if only because the hopeful scuffing and shuffling has ceased. In this silence a chair or a stool hits the ground, a sigh is heard. Somebody says something, somebody else answers. For a while you have to make this spot your own. Trouble starts when somebody objects. This is not where I ought to be standing, he may say to himself, and in an unguarded moment may voice his dissatisfaction openly. Everyone's afraid of such a challenge. Their common fear may stifle even ongoing arguments. What's at work, however, is not the voice of reason—people are simply afraid.

It did turn quiet, and felt like the quiet of an ordinary autumn morning. No shots could be heard anywhere. I was lucky to be able to rest my back against the side of a building. True, I had to maneuver a bit to end up in the right position. On the walls of this particular building you could still see the scars of the last war. Over the years the bullet holes filled up with soot and almost blended in with the moldering plaster. I grew up in this city and couldn't imagine buildings not looking this way. But the quiet I sensed was not real quiet after all—it

was overtaken by a distant, even rumble. I knew by then that inside that large shop the baking was done in three different ovens, and a new batch of bread came out every thirty-five minutes or so. We figured that with each baking cycle we'd advance about thirty yards. If the ovens could handle the load, that is. And if there was enough firewood. And they didn't run out of flour. Or could get a new delivery if they did. And if they could prepare the dough fast enough to feed the ovens. Which was not very likely. At this rate, one of us calculated, they'd have to go through twenty-seven cycles before our turn would come, probably sometimes in the late afternoon. The question wasn't whether we could wait that long but whether we would make it inside the bakery before dark. And if we didn't, would the curfew be lifted by then? It was more dangerous to violate the curfew at night than early in the morning. And almost impossible not to get caught, because at night there were patrols all over the city. By morning the fighting usually died down.

But now that rumbling noise kept getting louder. Past a certain threshold, there could be no doubt—a column of tanks was approaching. Now these convoys weren't all that frightening. With a rumble and a roar they would move from one location to another. As long as they didn't stop, there was nothing to worry about. Besides, it was highly unlikely that they would turn into such a narrow street. They preferred wider thoroughfares, and kept to the middle even there, to make it harder for people to hurl gasoline-filled bottles at them from their windows. The rumble came from the direction of the Angels Field district, and you could tell from the sound that they were going to pass through either Pozsonyi út or Pannónia utca. When you distinguished the clatter of the caterpillar treads in that maddening racket, you could be sure they chose Pozsonyi út. For in those days Pozsonyi út was still surfaced with yellow road bricks, which made the noise much screechier. First the clatter and the screech reverberated amid the tall buildings, and then, at the other end of the sunlit sidestreet, you saw the tanks themselves. They passed, one after another, equidistant from each other. Just as one left your field of vision, another entered it. The exhaust fumes dimmed even further the listless sunlight.

Nobody in our line moved. Those of us who could see into that tiny sidestreet kept looking. The fumes got so bad, and the roar so pervasive, everybody fell silent. Not that they would have heard even if people had kept on talking. And there was no end to the convoy. The vibration was picked up by the surrounding buildings, I felt it come together in my hands and feet, as though I wasn't the one shaking. And the rumbling and shaking grew even stronger, because the tanks, with the shrillest of shrieks, turned onto the ramp of Margit Bridge, and as they did the entire substructure began to shake. You felt the bridge in the soles of your feet. I had a city which was split in half by a river, but the familiar bridge was now reduced to a sensation. The vibration was picked up by the span itself, it spread to the block of houses around the bridge, I even felt it on my

back. It made you oblivious to everything around you, for you kept concentrating on your own shaking body. It didn't occur to me that we might be in danger, though it didn't sound as though this procession was going to end anytime soon. Yet such maneuvers were not rare, the Russians kept regrouping their forces, people on the street didn't pay much attention to these comings and goings. For a few days back then it even seemed possible that they'd leave for good. At least leave the city; maybe the whole country.

From where I was standing I had a fairly good view of that small sidestreet. The tanks passed a café called Samovar, and I could even see that. Behind the café's sun-streaked window there was a large photograph, showing Hedda Hiller, the lovely chanteuse, who only a few nights ago, had performed here. The café was open and crowded with people, all of them looking through the window, watching the tanks go by. There were also people on the sidewalk outside the café, and they, too, were watching. Then something happened which to this day I have difficulty assimilating. Sluggishly, though still as if it had a sudden change of heart, one of the tanks turned into this sidestreet, its treads grazed the sidewalk, the friction caused sparks to fly. The people standing around scattered in every direction. Some sought refuge in the café, others ran into the nearest apartment house. In a matter of seconds the street was empty. What remained was the heavy smell of gasoline, and bright shafts of sunlight creeping down from the rooftops. Those of us standing in line did not move. With its gunbarrel raised high, the tank was coming towards us.

For a moment it occurred to me that all it was doing was securing the column's safe passage, in which case all this was strictly routine. It got to the middle of the tiny street, stopped, but didn't cut its engine. Nothing was happening. At this point I even thought that perhaps it was having engine trouble, and that's why it left the column. But I also sensed trouble. At that very moment the tank's gun began to move. It came down, quite gently, as though it were aiming at the apartment house in front of it, or at the wide awning over the entrance of the Duna cinema. But there was nothing there. We stood under the awning—a motionless crowd waiting in line. It all happened so fast, my mind couldn't react, only my eyes. Even so I couldn't believe that the burst of flame darting out of the turret, the tank's twitch and shudder, meant that a shot was fired. And then another. Two frozen images. But in between the two, a terrifying explosion. Then a third shot, though all that could do was hit the blast, the mayhem, the clouds of dust, and follow up with yet another explosion. Everything was blown away. ❧

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Ottó Orbán

Poems

Translated by Bruce Berlind

The Three Graces

A három grácia

let's throw a little hen party they said

Helen Liz and Bubbles
their lives more romantic than Gone with the Wind
which again and again they wept over
when they had enough tears
because it so happened there was no revolution war mass terror
and the roof wasn't about to collapse on them any day now
and their men hadn't died out on them
seeing that they lived along the peoples' highway
a crowded place
where you were lucky to survive
and after so many ordeals and disasters
to have found such a decent husband
as Helen's Gyula

at least this once we can cut loose they said

Ottó Orbán
is a poet, essayist and translator. His volume of poems, The Blood of the Walsung, *translated by English and American poets, was published by Bloodaxe in 1993. The poems above are from* The Journey of Barbarus, *translated by Bruce Berlind, to be published by Three Continents Press, Colorado Springs, in 1995.*

and unfastened their bras under their robes
and cackling took out their false teeth
and moaned and mumbled while sopping
raisin bread in the milky coffee
and kicked off their shoes
and blissfully wiggled the toes of their stockinged feet

three survivors three war heroes
three wretched old women
one of them my mother

The Furious Orphan

Az őrjöngő árva

After a month of the staggers, I looked out the waiting-room window:
I was home, on the mud-acned earth, the trees
writhing in a foggy straitjacket.
In the examining room indifferent compassion sized up
the case of the orfano furioso*: "He'll sleep it off."*
No forest pulled up by the roots or other renaissance props;
in the heavenly workshop, if the master worked there at all,
he used a ruler and compass, once in a while wiping
his steamy glasses. The starry gear train wheeled. Black oil
leaked on the ground: night came. I whimpered
amidst the bone-spokes. The cellular system
of the reversed periscope focused in on
the local version of the general human landscape:
1940, diamond tram tracks, a flood of light clanging,
my father gliding ahead, me following. Instead of a sword, the angel
played with a movie projector. "The world's steamrolled over you
just one little bit," said the woman doctor. All set to comfort me,
she was no help at all. Outside, masked in sparkling memories,
the steamroller hid with snow its concrete kisser.

"Weltanschauung," the French poet gestured irritably;
the slow but continual round dance where momentous ideas
day in day out come a cropper didn't interest him.
"What I'm interested in is why this one or that one is depressed."
The long and short of it in a nutshell. In the glass birdcage
of the high rise the Ultimate Questions of Existence flitted about

like parrots in a pet shop. The day by day spectacle
remained concealed. The cell-maquis furiously persisted.
Swinging from wall to wall on the barbiturate seesaw, the so-called soul
mourned fiercely for itself. But the body kept doing what it knew:
digested and defecated. In disgrace the glorious
strained for a moment between earth and sky. A pontoon bridge
quaking under a column of tanks: this was him, sane psychosis
parcelled-up in flesh, the unrepeatable relation between good and evil.
"I feel for you," the Frenchman said, rising. In between fates
the spirit-door silently shut. "Boring,"
said the Fair-haired Cock of the local underground.
"The old fart's boring."

The Earth Drama Circle produced its zany farce. On the iron cot
the daughter of a good family lay naked. The doctor's space suit
was left in the hospital: "Be good now, okay?" Playing the Pirate Captain
the Secret Sickness Victim murmured in a film star's voice:
"Don't be afraid!" From the cigarette butt the angel of indigence
ascended in an image of smoke. The French visitor
saw me for a dacha owner. "Really!?
You don't have a car?" I looked at the Mediterranean from a plane,
the green dragon blew its nose on the rubbish-strewn shore,
and time jumped up and down to tend to
the negligible petty details that soften bones,
make mine shafts collapse and houses burn down. "How do you live here?"
I watched suspiciously the haughty little-girl's face, the twin cones
of the flesh volcano. A land of privation and riches. The onetime angler
cast out his bait for the future. On the pleasure line
the hook of grass/hill/water: my childhood. I bit down on my fate,
shaking with love and nausea. "Sweetie," gasped
the perishing European fish on the four-engined iron cot.

I watched the ocean from the hotel terrace above
the Ghandi Memorial. The South Pole crouched
behind the domestic flood. This was the future, this already-past:
under a radiant heaven my tongue burned with the acrid
taste of I AM. The woman doctor sat on the stone steps: in her
hundred-thousand-year-old earth-face the oceanic eyes waved in black,
her sari ruffled by the briny wind, her hands were rattling
a bunch of bone necklaces: "Do you love me?" A cigarette in my mouth
instead of a howl. I was living here on the lunatic lustful star,
where the light disc burnishes the tram tracks and the ocean,

and the orphan doesn't speak the orphan's language. Here I was the secret patron,
cared for and carer, fat cat of poverty, Earth's bastard: a witness.
Here I lost and won, here popped the sleeping pill of ideas,
tanked up on shame and schnapps. I exhaled the smoke of a Winston;
the Trivandrum Road gleamed to my grave, the common compromise,
the Every Minute Our Prize: I pay, the car moves forward,
in salty vapour, among palms, in the temporal/eternal present
I hear my mother, the elephant-moan of the ocean.

The Pretty Silverhead

Egy szép ezüstfejűhöz

Behold the woman I love
She'll be a beautiful old woman
With a head of silver at twenty-three
Injustice infuriates her
She slams the door and plaster rains down
Mr. Orpheus and his gray-haired wife
Descend to the depths of their years
The man half paralyzed the woman hard of hearing
Do you know where the mixture is
How's that? no soda?
It's right there on the table
Poor little old dears
How funny and pitiful they are
But when they look at each other they blossom
This is their big secret their witchcraft
This is what they are envied for and
This is why the gods hate them
Who in the golden mist of their silly myths
Wage war on each other in helmets and armour
And for relaxation impersonate the wind
Blowing coldheartedly through the world
And playing the flute on the scattered
Shinbones of mortals

On My Illness

Betegségemre

Slowly numbness marches with its troops
on the field of my body vaguely dozing off.
Let us imagine that blind destiny is Kutuzov,
the prince of strategy, a shabby old man,
who even in retreat is still on his own turf,
because everything belongs to him as it does to God.
However we imagine, the spark finally flies to the roof
and the burning village sizzles like fat ...
I don't learn from affliction, the ominous symptoms are useless—
the prophet's making is his monomania,
and a chaos more ordered than logic makes the poem,
the maelstrom of life in the puddle of a cell,
while our paralysed right hand lifted by the intact left one
points to the mirage of a new beginning.

He Tosses and Turns; Lives

Egyik oldaláról a másikra fordul; él

A heartbroken tiny village among the hills; houses turned blue, zigzag muddy streets. From here only God's feet are visible, bugs glistening in the wind like shiny nails . . . The bark of the angostura *tree in the drink of infinite sweetness: even at four in the morning I know, while watching a movie of the sleeping mind, that it's all in vain, the splendour, the gaggling of geese, the smell of earth and grass and manure, there's no starting over.*

Victor Határ

Pages from a Dream Diary

PROJECTS IN THE AIR

Got an invitation to a big Busdurmaniac town because I came to finish all the blueprints and details necessary for a big development scheme, the overall design for which I won in an international competition. Since Busdurmania was overseas I had to make the passage either by ferryboat and a long train journey or to take one of the rickety planes of Busdurmaniac Airlines, I opt for the sea voyage and the rail journey which seems to be safer. Yet from the outset there are difficulties—red-tape, luggage lost or mislaid, services overbooked and understaffed and, of course, the language-barrier. For a while I was stuck on the coast at the railway-station because the railway people and seamen alike came out in sympathy with air-traffic controllers who declared for industrial action: in railway-carriages, in lounges of air terminals and in the docks, people were trying to while away time by playing cards or overeating.

At last we set out from the sidings, on a long journey—the loco was a joke, the rattle of the cattle-trucks went on for days, across rural Busdurmania where there was nothing to see. In the capital—Busdurbanopolis—soon enough I found out that there are problems as well with Busdurmaniac bureaucracy, the local Planning Authorities. The language-barrier was next to nothing in comparison to the thought-barrier. Busdurmaniacs had a strange predilection to buy all sorts of TV programmes from abroad, mainly nature-films but their minds being focussed on the copulation scenes, they've cut everything else out. Thus, in the home, in hotel lounges and in pubs everywhere, in the evening peak hours there was nothing else on the TV screen but an interminable sequence of copulation performances—animals such as crocodiles, penguins, axolotles, buffaloes, camels, whales, badgers, robins and jackdaws copulating helter-skelter—a non-stop carrying-on of ants, praying mantises, dung-beetles, frogs, horses, armadillos, mongooses, tapirs, monkeys, spiders, etc. etc. The only difference being that—according to the commentary in the Busdurmaniac

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brogue—some of the predatory birds came from China, some of the underwater squids copulated in the Peruvian Zoo, some of the dinosauruses were not copulating at all, their act being simulated by computer animators in Disneyland. When Busdurmaniacs throw a party, they watch the whole of the Animal Kingdom in heat, in enraptured silence glued to the screen: and only when the gogglebox goes blank do they come alive: playboys and socialites go on endlessly about the "acts", stating their preferences in what they have seen, praising the prowesses of a copulating wildebeest or the subtleties of a mating daddy-long-legs. Whenever I am desperately trying to broach the subject of my splendid postmodern dream of a New Development full of Desirable Dreamhouses, with one of the Busdurmaniac chaps from the Committee liaising with me, everything becomes warped into appreciation of the Feature—the convolutions of the bundle of rattle-snakes in heat or the Black Mass of the dung-beetles.

So it happens that I am being put up by one of the magistrates who was instrumental in the decision of that international competition I won and soon enough I have an inkling that he is expecting some sort of a kickback in kind: he has two lovely daughters, one of which I am supposed to marry. Their docility and eagerness to initiate me into the secrets of that special interest of the Busdurmaniacs in natural history and in city planning leaves me baffled and mobilises my European defence mechanisms. It takes a few months to find out that city planning in Busdurbanopolis means sitting through endless sessions with all concerned, committeering and counter-committeering with the conspicuous absence of construction firms—no cranes, no bulldozers, no scaffolding—not even a site is in evidence. It's all hot air. Busdurmaniacs tend to band together until all committees are amalgamated in one great Conspiracy against the wretch who happens to be the Chosen Architect for the Job... What "Job"? After the umptiest session the magistrates are in revolt *en masse* and want to slash down all top floors, reduce the length and width of the winning Project and environmentalists and ecologists start to quizz and query the very suitability of the area for that kind of rural development and the rurality of the Project for that sort of area. Soon Architect and brainchild are shouted down and/or laughed out of court by all and sundry, because of the brutalism, the self-consciousness of his postmodern style. It's meek in its monstrosity, it's monstrous in its meekness. Someone for decency's sake finds in it a redeeming feature by slicing down its groundfloor, what remains wouldn't need any cellarage, and thus, the project pleasantly disappearing under the trees, the threat of deforestation has been eliminated. Consequently, once all blueprints have been zeroed to the ground, there will be no need to decide which site would be more suitable for the Project: a project, after having been duly and solemnly cancelled, does not need a site any more.

There are hundreds of committees in Busdurmania, all very active, the main aim of which is to prevent the desecration of the land by the corrupt practices of the building trade.

There is an admirable way of the Busdurmaniacs to preserve the girlish sweet slenderness of a pregnant woman and, at the same time, to allay all doubts as to the paternity of her child. At the sixth month of the pregnancy she and her husband enter a polyurethene cubicle—an invention of a great Busdurmaniac magician—and in the cubicle, lined with TV-screens and with all nature-programme features, all animal copulations on, the man is transmogrified into a woman, "his" womb inflated by the foetus which skids over into "daddy" from its mother's womb. After a further three months' pregnancy and in the presence of its mother's Penis (by courtesy of her husband) in full erection, Dad gives birth to his child (there cannot be any doubt as to its paternity). And then, as if by the waving of a magic wand, daddy is re-transmogrified into his original self (end of erection) while his wife, though bereft of her temporary Penis of which she was only the hostess, but lovelier than ever, slender as if no pregnancy had ever touched her, cuddles in her arms her newborn baby.

In order to keep my city planning Project alive, I am making the supreme sacrifice, I marry one of the daughters of the magistrate who is the all-powerful chairman of the executive committee. I shall bear my child the Busdurmaniac way: enter the cubicle, go through the motions, my transmogrification takes place as usual, I lend my Penis to my wife who assists my labours with a stout erection, we all are happy, I admire my baby whose paternity is "beyond doubt" and my in-laws are overjoyed with their grandchild. The miracle happens, cranes, bulldozers, scaffoldings are appearing on the site. For one year the construction of my Master Project is in full swing. Then the rot sets in. Slackness, lack of discipline, shortage of bricks. First the scaffolding starts to disappear, then, in the absence of scaffolding, the higher storeys being unclimbable to, all the building teams disappear too.

Storey by storey, dismantling being impossible, demolition takes place the cheapest way: during the night, by hooligans posing as "vigilantes". My daily visits to the Town Hall as well as my daily rows on the site do not make the slightest difference. One day, with no cranes, no girders, no nothing and even the fences torn down, I'm being politely told that my visits of "supervision" are no longer necessary.

"But what about my building?"

"What building?"

I have a good look through the dirty window of the cabin: no building.

"Where there is no building, there is nothing to supervise".

Soon it comes to the planting of trees and bushes, the site is being re-afforested and restored, as if the area had never been disturbed. Then comes the "mowing-in" ceremony—dozens of lawn-mowers mow away in all directions while the burgomaster cuts a ribbon with his golden scissors and declares "that splendid, that magnificent edifice, a glorious addition to the highlights of our beloved Busdurbanopolis and a triumph of postmodern architecture, open and ready for occupation".

In a huge marquee, erected in honour of a visiting prince, Busdurmaniacs toast the new development—a Monument of ancient Busdurmaniac building craft. My doubts reach a crisis point: I start to doubt the paternity of my own child, the child I bore to my lovely wife; my incredulity starts in her delicate soul a slow estrangement: the breach is not to be healed.

I make preparations for my departure but a strange coincidence turns my leaving into a rout. Because of a nationwide railway strike, all airtraffic controllers are called out in sympathy, and seamen and ferryboat companies are locked in a mortal battle of time-honoured disputes, my only way out is by Public Rickshaw. I hire the rick and his vehicle up to the border and dispatch my seatrunks by mail.

The mix-up is inevitable, I am landed with the toolkit of a taxidermist and several stuffed marsupials and copulating mongooses which are no use to me, while all my folk-art collections, laces and bobbins, horse's blinkers and bites, mule-saddles, plastic potteries, bakelite ocarinas and clay-pipes go round the globe until, like disintegrating hardware from outer-space well before the impact, every little bit melts into thin air.

(19 January 1989)

THE KING OF FRANCE

My bedside telephone rang.

A voice This is the king of France.
I I beg your pardon?
A voice The king of France speaking. Louis XIX.
I (don't believe my ears. Slightly disconcerted)
Sire! *Je suis bahu et ahuri—*
King Don't talk rubbish please, stick to your English.
I I do, your Majesty, I do! What can I do for you?
King You, do for me? It's the other way round.
I You mean...? It's past midnight, come to the point please.
King I'am. The point is that you're just the bloke we need.
I In what way?
King Well. You're a writer, are you not?
I I think so. In one way—yes.
King More than in one way: so I was told.
I Or misinformed. Just as I might be this very minute.
King Misinformed, you? And how?
I Are you *really* the king of France? I wonder.
For one thing this is an ex-directory number—

King Yes, I know. But we kings have a time-honoured privilege. A secret list compiled from all ex-directory numbers of the world.

I A privilege of the *métier*?

King You may put it that way. A trade prerogative. Goes back to ancient times when we kings too had our own guild, blazons, halls, trumpets, pennants, and all.

I A trade, Sire?

King Just like yours. Scribble, scribble, eh? Another damned thick book. The way of the world—

I Yours must be the busiest of all, Sire. With all those monuments to unveil, ribbons on new bridges to cut, guildhalls to dedicate, royal boxes to fill, cheering crowds to wave, seagoing vessels to launch, wars to declare: a king's timetable. Chock-a-block. Not a moment to spare. How did you manage to ring me?

King That's why I had to wait till after midnight, sorry about that, otherwise someone else would have done it for me: we personally never dial, never carry any money, no need for that—

I Oh yes, it makes all the difference. What a blessed state to be in!

King Would you like to be king?

I Me? Good Heavens!

King Not even for a moment?

I God forbid.

King You fibber. Why not?

I It would ruin my career as a writer. Spoiling my game. But talking of fibbing—

King Yes...?

I Who is the fibber, I wonder. Calls may go astray in the network, some practical jokers may present themselves as the king of France and how should I know—

King Well, I'm hurt. Deeply hurt. It's so true to life: harbingers of good news are rarely believed—

I Harbingers of what good news...?

King Listen mister. Soon you will have this Instrument sent to you by Royal Mail, an Extraordinary Royal Courier of mine will hand it over and you will be deeply ashamed for what you have just said and will regret it. I do not take it as a slight or *lèse majesté*, for you are not in the know but I am—
In the know of what?

King "Sire", please! I do not expect a subject to kowtow on the telephone but a proper address I wouldn't mind before I break the connection, and don't pretend you're not flattered, nay, overwhelmed—

I To break what, your Majesty?

King The matter of fact is that *dans mon Académie* someone died recently. An *immortel* of sorts, a nonagenarian and completely gaga, some philosopher but harmless as a philosopher can be and ludicrously innocuous. We're supposed to be forty all in all, and a seat is vacant. It will be voted upon but the Throne has its special influence—

I Immortality? Never crossed my mind.

King It crossed mine—

I But why me?

King Now don't be cross, but kings too have their crazy games when tortured by *ennui*. Living in a palace is one—even the loo is too far: and there are aggravating circumstances like—

I Like what, Sire?

King Like an excruciatingly long and sleepless night. On such a night anything might take one's fancy—

I I still do not see where I'm supposed to come into it. Did you come across one of my books, have you ever read anything by me?

King Me? Never. But that's the beauty of it! On one of those excruciatingly long nights in my bedchamber, tossing an' turning in my State Bed with its curtains drawn, I took my secret Directory of all Ex-Directory numbers of the world, shut my eyes, opened the book and put my finger at random on the list. It was your name I randomized.

I A sort of *Sortes Virgilianae*?

King A sort of *Sortes Virgilianae*, if you like. With my index finger under your name, I opened my eyes and read, "occupation: author". Lucky hit, I said to myself and laughed heartily , that's exactly the bloke we need *pour l'Académie Française*, a harmless philosopher who's ludicrously innocuous. His name is somewhat weird and the language he is writing in, *cela m'est du Hongrois*, is a kind of weirdo too, but he will do, never mind his eccentricity, that was never an obstacle to becoming one of the *immortels*, and anyway, I will exert my Royal Prerogative...

I But I do not qualify, being a *sale méteque*—

King Never mind *that*, who cares. We will see to it. What about Algeria where you were born—

I In Algeria? I? Never.

King Don't you worry, we'll see to it. Algiers then—

I In Algiers? Just like Camus?

King Just like who...?

I Camus.

King Never heard of 'im.

I Sire!... Are you *really*, VÉRITABLEMENT the king of France?

King Most certainly *bien sur*, I am.

I And you don't know who Camus was?

King There is such a *sea* of subjects. He hasn't been presented in Court.

I Well, being the rogue element he was, I bet he wasn't—

King What did you say?

I It was just an *aside*, out of context of our dream: *ad spectatores*, sort of—

King *Good*. Algiers then; whereby you've been ethnicly cleansed and redeemed. You qualify.

I A joke which is turning sour. A night caller, I do not know who he is, who overstays his welcome.

King Now, now. Recalcitrancy won't do. It's irrelevant, it's simply not done in my Court.

I I'm not in your Court and you're no king of France.

King Don't be abusive. Listen! Listen! Do not ring off on me, it's preposterous!

I Yes I will. And goodbye—

King (his voice turns *falsetto*, becoming more and more desperate) Listen! Listen! I have sterling proof of it! You're speaking to His Most Catholic Majesty, the King of France, listen for God's sake—

I The King of France my foot—

King Listen! Christ! This is your last chance! ... Jesus!

I And your Royal Prerogative with the *immortels* of the French *Académie*: not on your nelly! —

I slammed down the receiver and waited, beside myself with rage. Just as I expected. Within minutes the phone rang again. I lifted it and "Hullo", I snorted into it, angrily. Cooing, an angelic voice answered—

Voice This is the Queen of France speaking...

It was a different dream.

(13 December 1988)

Ferenc Molnár

Budapest, July 23, 1914

Eighty years have passed since Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, was assassinated at Sarajevo by a young member of a secret society of Serbian nationalists. An Austro-Hungarian ultimatum was sent to the Serbian government on July 23, followed within a week by the outbreak of the First World War. In a Budapest newspaper, Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952), the celebrated playwright of later years, described his impressions of the fateful day on which the ultimatum was sent.

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Three o'clock in the afternoon. Unbearable heat. Somebody says, "This isn't that nice, dry, scorching heat, the kind you can even enjoy... God knows what this is." We sit on the terrace of the café and everything is unbearable—the waiter, the coffee, the newspaper, everything. At the next table there is talk about a swimming pool. The heat presses down on your head like a tight hat. You remove your straw hat and your feeling is that another hat remains on it, warmer, heavier, tighter. All around, everybody has unbuttoned his jacket and his vest, some even the collar. A waiter passes by with a lemon sherbet. A weary voice: "For me too..." Another: "There'll be an ultimatum by week's end... and Serbia will cave in, I tell you..." The heat is so awful that it is impossible to sit or stand or read or smoke. Really, the thing to do would be to go home. A voice: "...to undress, to take a bath, to stay undressed till evening..." A friend suggests that we go to Margaret Island. We leave.

Sitting in the fiacre with our heads uncovered, we keep staring glassily at the skies where a gray veil covers the sun and now another, dirty yellowish brown, is drawn across it. The air is motionless. We seem to be slowly swimming in hot lead. Yet another veil is dropped over the sun. The toll collector at the bridge studies the skies, turns this way and that with head thrown back. It seems likely to rain soon.

Four o'clock.

On the island, three of us in a room. Our host has stretched out on the bed, pipe in mouth. We all smoke silently, our clothes are all over chairs and tables. Gradually, darkness falls beyond the windows, where huge trees stand unbelievably immobile. It is now certain that a storm is coming. I once saw a steer slaughtered in a village. The animal refused to enter the slaughter-hall and had to be manhandled, horns tied down, head forced upward, but it kept resisting. The butcher stepped aside to pick up an axe. At that moment the steer suddenly became transfixed, petrified. I recall its perfect immobility awaiting the blow and accepting death, as I look at those stately trees with their myriad leaves motionless—like a painting. I cannot see anything as yet, but they already sense the approach of lightning and tempest from the distance. Somewhere far away the sound of thunder. Here a slight breeze passes, the trees sigh. Again, thunder. We are watching. One of us says quietly: "It's coming closer..." We all think about the hard times in which we live—we feel the pressure of some strange anguish against our breasts. A bell tolls faintly in the older quarter of Buda. In the wake of a shrieking gust the sky turns pitch dark. Raindrops begin to drum on the tin roof. A horrendous clap is followed by reverberating thunder, and twelve giant trees lean to one side: the storm has ambushed them from behind the building. They rebound, but the wild wind renews its attack and as their power wanes, the trees sway to and fro like blades of grass. The gale goes through them like a giant comb, pressing the dense grove to one side and literally combing it back and forth. All branches and leaves lean in the same direction, like hair carefully combed sideways. Boughs are cracking, a window falls and glass is shattered, some voices are heard. The wind throws curtains of water over the combed forest, four or five in quick succession. The thunder is now incessant. At times the sounds of that bell come through from Buda, driven by the gale. Curtains of water now swing back and forth, veils of rain swish over the grove. The yellow wall of the house is turning brownish. From somewhere in the distance the long, long scream of a woman reaches us. A tremendous thunderclap, followed by a cacophony of creaking and grating noises all around is now heard. But the flow is no longer steady, only some flying rags of rain, battle flags of water, wave over the whining multitude of leaves. Somewhere from the direction of the inner city a bugle sounds: probably firemen are rushing to some buildings that have collapsed.

The heat in the room is unbearably intense; we open the windows and the sharp sounds of the subsiding storm reach us together with a bit of cool breeze. The skies have cleared somewhat. The janitor says that the storm has uprooted some thirty trees. By the time he finishes telling us everything, the rain is coming down quietly and the skies are brightening up in a yellowish gleam. The bugle keeps sounding from the direction of the city.

Six o'clock.

We are walking through the ravaged island. I have to go into town, where a friend of mine has received an urgent telephone call from the Prime Minister's

office. We hurry on. The island's telephones are out of order. Workers are already sawing up the fallen trees. We pass by a capsized boathouse which lies on one side in the Danube, half under water, recalling similar pictures in the British press of the shipwreck of the *Empress of Ireland*.

The sun refuses to come out, the air is oppressive, everyone is in a bad mood. What could the Prime Minister be worried about? Not war, we trust. At the editorial office a letter is waiting for the editor: he has to go to the office of Premier Tisza at ten-thirty for an important statement for the press. What could it be about? My friend is walking up and down in the room, smoking nervously. Terrible weather, eclipse, trees torn out, thunder, lightning, bells, bugles, nocturnal conference, war... Nerves are taut. Yet, after all, we are living in a marvellous century. Not long ago we were reluctant to enter it, but now that we are right inside it we are breathing it in voraciously, greedily, wholeheartedly. War? Nobody knows what's coming. At midnight, we will know. We sit in silence. I close my eyes. That far-away sound of bugle echoes very faintly in my brain.

Nine o'clock.

We have heard some details of the devastation caused by the storm. Some people were killed, but somehow even this seems unimportant now. We all talk about the nocturnal conference. Ominous remarks float around. "We will be pushing into Serbia..." Within a couple of hours it's all over town that Tisza called in twenty-three newspaper editors. Everybody keeps glancing at his watch. A strong wind blows, the skies are a sharp, shining, transparent blue which ends abruptly, somewhere about the rooftops black clouds are swirling. In looking up, you feel you are inside a deep, dark well, above which the cloudless segment of the skies shines like a silver-and-blue glass dome. The blackness keeps spreading on the horizon, as if a thick, rolling, loathsome substance were oozing out of the earth. Telephones are ringing. In the crowded café, the whole staff of the *Esti Kurír* sits at a long table, at the ready. I have never heard so few jokes from a bunch of newsmen as this evening. Not one, in fact.

Half past eleven.

A huge motor car stops in front of the café. At the newsmen's table everyone rises and stands rigidly in sudden silence. Here and there a few men jump up. There are surprisingly few women here tonight. People are hurrying after the newspapermen, watch them climb into the car or spring onto its step and hold on to the body; it takes off with an obscene blast and leaves behind a word that suddenly links people to each other: "War!" This short, strange word that sounds like thunder is now carried back into the café where everyone is standing by his table. It whirrs and rumbles in macabre crescendo, merging with the din caused by chairs being pushed back simultaneously. A single, feverish, drawn-out wail goes up: "War!"

Some people race down the avenue, a dandy jumps onto a hansom and yells at the coachman, the vehicle starts with a jerk but the passenger remains on his

feet. Half-grins of fear and confusion are on many faces. Down the length of Elizabeth Boulevard one riot squad after another flashes by with shrieking sirens. Some wave at them from the sidewalk for no perceptible reason. The skies have once again become dark: a cold wind tugs at the puny trees bordering the Boulevard. On Oktogon Square clutters of people are arguing and the word leaps from one group to another and back again, grim and unfamiliar-sounding: "War!... War!..." Everyone is aroused and agitated. Nobody knows anything.

Two o'clock past midnight. Everyone knows everything.

The regulars of casinos and bars now crowd into the large cafés. The arguing is over, replaced by subdued murmurs rooted in fatigue. Scattered all around are lithographed handbills produced and distributed by the reporters who had been at the long table. It is now the deadline that preoccupies everybody, Saturday evening at six. "Do you know all the conditions?"—"Of course I do... a while ago a newspaperman jumped on the billiard table and read them off..."—"Will all of them be accepted, d'you suppose?"—"Whaddayamean all?"—"Yeah, all!" A voice at another table: "Each point?" A very strong voice at the window: "...at six on Saturday, and unless all of them..." The consensus is that bargaining is out. In comes a journalist and suggests: "...some points... not all..." This is taken as an insult, everyone coldly or hotly demands full compliance with each and every point of the ultimatum.

A few are leaving, and some call after them. One yells "How can you sleep at a time like this?" One yells back "I'll try!" Another, "Should I stay up till six o'clock Saturday?" This is the first jocular remark made tonight. I am very tired, but I just don't feel like leaving as long as anybody stays. Still, after a while a colleague and I agree to go to the editorial office of the *Pesti Hírlap*.

The streets are desolate, silent, even the winds are exhausted. The windows of the office glow in the night: the first copies off the press are being spotchecked. The machines are steadily droning in the basement. Reporters wearily wave goodnight to each other at the entrance. "Saturday ... six...", the phrase like a password for a decisive encounter stays with us through the night. A few labourers gather around the gate, waiting for the morning paper. They too mumble about Saturday. The great scoop of the night has been pushed into the background by the expectation focused on Saturday. We go home.

Three o'clock, near dawn.

Same room and same host as in the afternoon during the thunderstorm. He is stretched out on the bed as before, smoking a pipe as before. Deep, pervasive, soothing silence hangs over Margaret Island. Not even ships are sounding their horns as they usually do. The uproar of the day, the tumult of the night, all is now behind us in this peace and quiet. I have a headache. Everyone around us is asleep. I wonder if the Prime Minister is asleep too. It is about half past three now, dawn is due. Perhaps the King is about to waken up. What could he be thinking? I say goodbye and go to my hotel room, open the window, turn off the

light and peer out toward the tail of the island, toward Újpest, where the sun is about to rise. The skies are transparently green, something like the lovely light green of the sea. Thoughts are crowding into my mind from many different directions as I stare out into the dawn. Suddenly a bugle brays from the Buda side, but it's not the drawling tone of a fireman's trumpet: this is the fresh, crackling sound of an army bugle. Soldiers camped along the Danube are being roused. And now the sun rises over Újpest, lusterless, cold, brick-red, a startingly large disk. The skies are turning red. I lie on the bed and watch. For twenty years I have been living in the belief that I was born in a poor, small country of monotonous repose, far from the grand passions of great nations, in a peaceful, cultured, inventive, untroubled era. And now I go to sleep in the knowledge that I am at the centre of the world and that everything that agitates mankind is raging through my homeland. I feel that this excitement, this suddenly boiling existence is worth two lifetimes—a gift from God to those of us who had thought that our destiny was merely to watch, from a nook, the tremendous drama of life in this world. Even the storms are different, the joys greater, the tragedies deeper than they were when I was a youngster. Everything that is big and fascinating and world-shaking is happening right around this nook of ours. What an unbelievable day this has been... Several months have passed on this Thursday. ❧

Translated by Andor C. Klay

Budapest, July 23, 1914

Ignác Romsics

Détruire ou reconstruire l'Autriche-Hongrie?

French Foreign Policy in the Danube Region at the Beginning of the 20th Century

In recent centuries French policy towards the Danube region has been determined by France's struggle with her eastern neighbour or neighbours. The nations of Eastern Europe (or the Danube region) have always been judged by the position they took towards France in this rivalry. Consequently, from the beginning of the modern age France supported any force, whether headed by Prince Gabriel Bethlen, Prince Francis II Rákóczi or Lajos Kossuth, which, directly or indirectly, frustrated the German cause. Reasons of geography and actual strength naturally set a limit to this support. On some occasions the French used these Hungarian rebels as simple pawns in their own game, unscrupulously dropping them at the crucial moment; the last instance of this was at the end of the 1850s when certain Hungarian exiles, including their leader, Lajos Kossuth, were exploited and then abandoned by Napoleon III. This bitter experience was summed up in a saw that was to become one of the corner-stones of Hungarian political philosophy: *Le Dieu est haut et la France est loin.*

France's assessment of a Habsburg Empire, including Hungary, placed on a new constitutional basis in 1867, was determined by the Austrian and Hungarian attitude to the unification of Germany. As long as it was reasonable to assume that the Dual Monarchy, while maintaining an independent foreign policy, would continue to play a moderating and balancing role as regards the Second German Reich, Palacky's famous epigram ("If the Habsburg Empire did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it") met with approval in France. By the 1880's, however, after Bismarck had succeeded in establishing a system of alliances aimed primarily at isolating France and at drawing the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy into this system through promises of support for her interests and designs in the Balkans, the standing of the Danubian Empire in French eyes noticeably declined. Around the year 1900, this made itself manifest in the proliferation of critical views and in growing interest in both pan-Slavism and various Slav schemes to reorganize the Monarchy on a federal basis. By the time the Great War broke out, a plan to break up the Monarchy

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into nation-states had already taken shape. By the time the war ended, this had become the accepted aim of French foreign policy. My purpose here is to discuss the origins of this plan, and the way in which it became official French policy. I shall refer to a number of books and essays reflecting, and also influencing, contemporary French political thinking, as well as to documents in the Quai d'Orsay Archives and, of course, to the relevant literature.

The first highly influential proponent of both the pan-Slav idea and of a federal reorganization of the Monarchy as possible means to counter German expansionism was Louis Léger (1843-1923), who taught Slavonic studies at the Collège de France. He was thoroughly familiar with the literature on the Balkan region and on the territories inhabited by western Slavs within the Monarchy; he had also travelled there. By 1917, he had written over twenty books on subjects ranging from Slavonic languages and literatures to the history of Eastern Europe and of Russia.

Of all the Slav nations, he was most closely associated with the Czechs; by 1911 he had visited Bohemia on six occasions. He learned to speak Czech and promoted Czech culture, something appreciated by the Czechs in a number of ways. In 1871, immediately following France's defeat by Prussia, Léger started work on *Correspondence Slave*, a journal whose goal "était l'union intime de nôtre pays avec la race Slave pour contenir les insatiables ambitions de l'Allemagne."[1]

From the very start, Léger enthusiastically supported the idea of changing the dualist structure of the Monarchy into trialism—both in the Czech and the South Slav version. He devoted his 1882 visit to the Balkans to the study of the Illyrian Republic established during the Napoleonic era. By dint of great effort, he was able to discover the marks these few years had made on the infrastructure, the administration and the way people thought. He published the following version of a conversation, which allegedly took place between the Emperor of Austria, visiting the provinces just after they had been liberated from the French, and a local escort member of his entourage.

"Who built this bridge?" the Emperor asked his guide.

"Your Majesty, the French."

"Who planted these trees?"

"Your Majesty, it was the French."

"Who paved this road?

"The French."

"Truly," the Emperor added smiling, "it's a shame then they did not stay longer" .

This chapter concluded that a "Yugoslav" unit of five million people within Austria-Hungary, based on the Illyrian Republic but also including Bosnia-Herzegovina, was desirable.[2]

By the early 1910s, Léger no longer merely wished to replace dualism by trialism but urged a federal state organized along ethnic lines. Léger, like R.W. Seton-Watson, Wickham Steed and others, made much of the deficiencies, errors and sins of Austro-Hungarian national minorities policy. He never made a secret of the fact, however, that what mattered to him was the security of his own country. If federalism and universal secret suffrage were to be achieved, then the Slavs, thanks to their numbers, would dominate the Empire and "Austria would surely leave the Triple Alliance, and move closer to France and Russia," Léger wrote.

Pan-Slavism itself was only important to Léger because it admirably complemented how he saw France's national security. The halting of German expansion was in the common interest of both the Slavs and the Latins, Léger wrote; for this purpose, the two "races" had to suspend

their conflicts and unite against the common enemy. This logic eventually led him to the idea of "Great Slavia", the common homeland of every Slav, the ancient dream of all pan-Slav ideologists. However, Léger did not elaborate on this idea before 1917.[3]

France's other leading specialist in the Habsburg Empire, who taught history at the Sorbonne, was Ernest Denis (1849-1921). Together with his students, including Louis Eisemann, he addressed the same problems in the period preceding the outbreak of the First World War. "It is fashionable to predict the imminent dissolution of the monarchy of the Habsburgs", Denis wrote in 1903 in a work discussing the history of Bohemia after the Battle of the White Mountain. He went on to add nevertheless, that "the necessities which led to the creation of Austria in the sixteenth century have not disappeared." Therefore, whatever grievances the Hungarians and the Poles, the Czechs and the South Slavs might have, the preservation of Austria-Hungary was in their common interest.[4]

In his *L'Europe et la question d'Autriche au seuil du XXe siècle*, a journalist, André Chéradame, went so far as to claim that the Habsburg Empire's real enemy was not Russia and pan-Slavism, but Germany and pan-Germanism. Therefore, the interests of France and Russia actually demanded the consolidation and not the dissolution of Austro-Hungary. That was the external condition for an Austro-Hungarian recovery, the internal condition being "federalism, the sole form of government which assures respect for the Austrian peoples; this is in the interest of humanity." Chéradame took the federating of Austria as inevitable and that this would also lead to a change in the empire's foreign policy. The earlier German-Italian-Romanian orientation would be replaced by a French-Russian-Bulgarian orientation, and thus raise the military potential of the latter alliance to a level that would exclude the possibility of future armed conflict.[5]

Naturally, works predicting—in some cases, dreaming about—the disintegration of Austria-Hungary were also published. Probably the best known of these is a 1884 political travelogue, *Patrie hongroise*, written by Madame Edmond Adam (1836-1936), a notorious Germanophobe and republican. Madame Adam was convinced that on the day of reckoning the Danubian empire held by the Austrian-Germans would side with Germany. She anticipated that the liberal and patriotic Hungarians (whose separatism she welcomed for the same reason) would take the opposing stance. She supported the creation of a sovereign, strong and united Hungary within the country's historic borders. While recommending generosity in the treatment of the Slavs, she desired that all Slav separatism be ruthlessly repressed. Indeed, Madame Adam was actively involved in the preparation of the Franco-Russian alliance in 1891. However, she rejected any thought of a "Great Slavia", dreamt up by Léger, just as she rejected pan-Slavism or the extension of the Russian sphere of influence to the Danube region. This would have run contrary to France's national interest, in the same way as Germany's *Mitteleuropa* plans. She, therefore, called on the national minorities to listen to reason, be loyal to the Hungarian state, while asking the Hungarians to show a generosity worthy of the spirit of Wesselényi and Petőfi.[6]

Another kind of dissolution was predicted, and supported, by J. E. Pichon in 1913, writing under the pseudonym Jules Chopin. Pichon, who taught French at the Czech University of Prague (after 1901) did not believe that the Habsburg Empire

would be able, or willing, to preserve its freedom of action in the face of German pressure, nor that the reorganization of the dualist state along federal lines, and the resulting Slav dominance, was in the French interest. His article rhetorically asks what the consequences would be if the latter were realized. "The Slavs are certain to turn towards the great Slav empire, towards Russia, as Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia already do. Such an alliance between Russia and Austria would pose an even greater danger to the balance of power in Europe than an alliance between Austria and Germany." Therefore, there was no alternative to the "abolition of Austria". However, in discussing the new states to replace Austria-Hungary, Pichon deviated from Madame Adam's line of argument, choosing instead to radicalize the plans of Léger and others by predicting the modest rise of a number of "homogeneous, free and independent small states: Bohemia, Austria (Lower and Upper), Galicia, Dalmatia, etc. To avoid them becoming the plaything of the great powers, they would obviously have to form a close alliance, as the Balkan states had just done. Palacky's observation on the necessity of the Habsburg Empire was not tenable in the long run, Pichon argued in conclusion; instead, history would confirm the truth of Palacky's message addressed to the Reichsrat in Frankfurt on the prospects of Bohemia's becoming a German state: "We were there before Austria, and we could well be there after her."[7]

Madame Adam and Professor Pichon were not really influential before the Great War. Informed French political and public opinion was convinced that, in spite of all its shortcomings and internal weaknesses, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was still the best guarantee of the balance of political power in Central and Eastern Europe; France's interests lay in the transformation and modernization of Austria-Hungary, not in its disintegration. In the months immediately following the outbreak of the war, the situation changed somewhat in that more publicity was given to those proposing, demanding or simply predicting the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Yet, however, arguments for its preservation and modernization continued to be heard.

The two disappointed champions of a federal empire, Louis Léger and Ernest Denis, became the two most active proponents of the idea of carving up Austria-Hungary into a number of nation-states. "Austria failed to fulfil its historic mission." "Having become the advance guard of Germany", who thus finally gained access to the Mediterranean, "Austria must disappear." These were Léger's words at the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915.[8] Similar views can be found in Denis's writings. In his *La Grande Serbie*, he wrote: "The Habsburgs could have performed the job of keeping Germany under surveillance, but they have refused it and it is too late in the day to return to it. The Habsburgs must disappear. The first condition of stability for a new Europe is the suppression of Austria."[9]

However, when it came to minor details, the two differed. At that time, Léger still envisaged three successor states: Austria-Hungary (German and Hungarian ethnically and linguistically); a new kingdom to include Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Slovakia, and a great south Slav confederation under a Serbian protectorate. Of the remainder, Galicia was to be shared between Russia and Poland, Transylvania was to be annexed by Romania, and Bukovina to be split between Romania and Russia; the Trentino, Trieste, Pola, and the Italian littoral were to go to Italy. [10]

The map of the Danube Basin, as redrawn by Denis, showed three significant

departures from Léger's version. First, instead of a dualist state, Denis envisaged two independent countries: Austria and Hungary. Second, on historical, geographical and economic considerations, and out of respect for Hungarian "sentiments", Denis preferred to see Transylvania in union with Hungary, albeit with a wider political autonomy. Third, he reformulated the more than fifty-year-old plan of a Slav corridor between Pozsony (Bratislava) and Zagreb, which until then had only been a pan-Slav pipe-dream. This was the only instance when "violation of the ethnic principle is unavoidable due to overriding considerations". In fact, Denis had two such "overriding" considerations: one was the Czech interest in obtaining access to the Mediterranean and the wish to establish a passage between the western and southern Slavs; the other was the need to separate the Germans from their "servants and lackeys", the Hungarians.[11]

Later that same year (1915), Denis published his book on the history of Serbia. In its final chapter he outlined the borders of the future "grande" south Slav state. By and large, the line he drew between Hungary and Yugoslavia was identical with the future Trianon frontier. In the East it followed the line of the River Maros, Arad and Szeged remaining in Hungary; it cut through the Bácska at the latitude of Szabadka (Subotica) and, winding northward, reached the Danube at Baja. It followed the River Dráva towards the confluence of the Mura and Dráva.[12]

Naturally, it would be extremely difficult to try to establish in retrospect how much public support Denis and Léger actually enjoyed back in 1914 and 1915. Nevertheless, it is revealing that Edith Marjanovic, who analysed the French press from this angle too, was able to find only four articles which speculated on the transformation of the Habsburg Empire, rather than its dissolution. Three of these envisaged a trinity of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia, and the fourth argued for a federation with four members, the addition being Croatia with the adjoining south Slav territory. A majority of journalists, including Stephen Pichon, the editor of *Le Petit Journal,* who later became foreign minister, speculated on the dissolution of Austria-Hungary.[13]

Both Léger and Denis, and especially the latter, not only wrote books but also contributed to the press and were public speakers. From May 1915, Denis edited the journal *La nation tchèque* in cooperation with Eduard Beneš. It played the same role in the Latin countries as *New Europe*, edited by R.W. Seaton-Watson and published in London after 1917, did in Britain and America. On March 16, 1916, Denis presided over a meeting of intellectuals at the Sorbonne, which specifically called for the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the creation of Czechoslovakia. Speaking as a member of the committee set up in 1916 to work out the French war aims, he again argued for dissolution.[14]

The French government proclaimed a policy for dissolution considerably later and in a much less straightforward manner, always with an eye to the actual military situation. Initially, France's war aims were limited to the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine, at most the annexation of the Saar and the left bank of the Rhine as well as the re-unification of Poland, with some sort of autonomy for the country. The latter was flatly rejected by France's ally, Russia.[15]

In the interest of strengthening their own camp, the Allied powers accepted as justified Serbian, Italian and Romanian demands for certain Austro-Hungarian territories in a number of secret agreements in 1915 and 1916. This, however, did not im-

ply the end of the Empire, merely a vast reduction in its size and strength. (Transylvania, Bukovina and the Banat were promised to Romania; South Tyrol, Gorizia, Istria, and Northern Dalmatia to Italy, and the rest of the south Slav territories, with the exception of Croatia and Slovenia, to Serbia. These promises were hardly well-considered. They appeared more like improvisations in a game of give-and-take, rather than the foundations of a new European order.

There is ample evidence that in the early years of the war French foreign policy favoured the preservation of Austria-Hungary, rather than its destruction. Reporting to Paris on a conversation with Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, in January 1915, Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador in St Petersburg, wrote: "The Austrian question is the only one where we have to anticipate certain differences of opinion with the Russian government. As long as Germany and Italy exist, we will be interested in maintaining Austria." Léger's memorandum of April 2, 1915, in which he dealt with the Czech issue and recommended giving the Czechs either full independence or the same status as the Hungarians, was described by a Quai d'Orsay official (probably Laroche, later to be one of the key French figures at the peace conference): "... there is nothing new in it; it evokes historical memories and lists the Czechs' aspirations, with no arguments whatsoever and with no great precision." Even Berthelot himself, who was probably more sympathetic to Beneš than any other French diplomat, advised Paléologue on August 8, 1916, in connection with recruiting a Czech legion: "The time has not come yet to decide on the fate of Bohemia." When Beneš, then secretary of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris, asked the French government in December 1916 to support the establishment of a wholly independent Czechoslovak state, he was given similarly evasive answers by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Aristide Briand. These answers, together with the drafts drawn up in preparation for the meeting, unequivocally show that France firmly rejected any commitment to an independent Czechoslovakia or the abolition of Austria-Hungary. Finally, one should mention the 1916 recommendations of the *Comité national d'études sociales et politiques*. After long, heated debate, the committee concluded that France's interests lay in the federation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and not in its abolition.[16]

It has occasionally been argued that "during the first years of the First World War the French Government came round to supporting the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the independence of its Slavic or Romance nationalities or their annexation to their national parent states", and that "the French military planners were also prepared at the end of 1914 to dissolve the Dual Monarchy".[17] This is either exaggerated or based on a misunderstanding. The origin is a document dated December 31, 1914, in Bordeaux, which was wrongly assumed to express the opinion of the French High Command. It was in fact prepared by a Romanian refugee from Austria-Hungary; it was filed by the high command and was circulated without any comment, merely as a report on the state of the enemy's morale.[18]

To sum up, it can be concluded that in the first half of the war France had no clear and long-term Danubian policy. In the interests of victory, France—like the other allied powers—made various, and to some extent conflicting, promises (Serbia versus Italy); it tolerated the activities of exiles representing the national minorities of Austria-Hungary in Paris, so much so

that after 1916 it permitted recruiting amongst Czech prisoners of war. Nevertheless, France never expressly urged the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. The fundamental dilemma was thus left undecided.

This same uncertainty, or even deliberate ambiguity, characterized the joint declaration, at President Wilson's request of January 10, 1917, in which the Allied Powers made their first attempt to formulate a concerted Danubian policy. This much cited text mentioned Austria-Hungary's responsibility for starting the war, and the "liberation of the Italians, of Slavs, of Romanians, and the Czecho-Slovaks from foreign domination" was declared to be one of the war aims of the signatory powers. Some historians, such as Kalervo Hovi, already mentioned in connection with the document dated December 1914, interpreted this as a commitment to the break-up of Austria-Hungary. Others, such as Edith Marjanovic, Zbynek Zeman or the American David Kelly, are of the opinion that the expression "liberation from foreign domination" actually referred to federalism and political autonomy for the national minorities.[19] The latter interpretation is confirmed by the fact that neither the break-up of Austria-Hungary nor any independent south Slav or Czech state was mentioned in the French memorandum which was the basis for the joint declaration by spelling out the conditions for peace from the French point of view. In the memorandum, the sole Habsburg dominion mentioned by name is Croatia, but only in connection with the division between Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro of what was left of Dalmatia after Italy took its share.[20]

Even if we were to accept Hovi's view that French war aims in late 1916 and early 1917 included the break-up of Austria-Hungary and the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, it would still be wrong to assign too much importance to it. Even if it had been official French policy, it proved to be a rather short-lived policy. Romanian defeats at the end of 1916 and the February 1917 revolution in Russia, together with the new Austro-Hungarian Emperor Charles's intention to sign a separate peace, seemed to vindicate those who saw France's interests lying in the modernization of Austria-Hungary, rather than in its dissolution. The French High Command, which, interestingly enough, showed a great deal more initiative in the preparation of long-term policies than did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, submitted two such memoranda in the first half of 1917.

Both memoranda explored possible ways of countering Germany's *Mitteleuropa* policies and both speculated on the survival of Austria-Hungary. In their details, however, the two plans showed substantial differences. Unconcerned with the possibility of the Slav territories' splintering off, one of the plans called for the annexation of Prussian Silesia and southern Germany by Austria, in order to form a strong Catholic confederation as a restraint on northern Protestant, agrarian and militant Prussia.[21] (The same plan was discussed by a committee discussing the French war aims in 1916. Strongly opposing Denis, the industrialist François Wendel argued that it was an abuse of the national principle to use it for the sole purpose of "suppressing the Habsburgs" and "regrouping under this heading the seventy million Germans of Austria and the Reich". "We need an Austria sufficiently important not to become Berlin's satellite; an Austria without Bohemia, Transylvania, Galicia etc., but enlarged by southern Germany." [22])

Dusting off the prewar proposals for a federal Austria, the High Command recommended in their second memorandum the

transformation of Austria-Hungary into a confederation of national and ethnic units.

In its current ("dualist and feudal") form, Austria-Hungary must, indeed, "disappear". If, however, it was simply left to disintegrate, then that would only make life easier for Germany; the small independent states, each without access to the sea and all jealous of each other, would literally fall over one another to win the favour of their powerful neighbour. Therefore, the task—and the slogan—was not "delenda Austria", but "constituenda Austria!" This was to be effected as a voluntary union of nation-states, independent and democratic, but still under the Habsburg sceptre. The proposed new empire would consist of five geographical units, four national and one multi-ethnic in character: Austria, Bohemia (the Moravian and the Czech areas without Slovakia), "Hungary minor", Croatia (the Empire's Croatian, Slovenian, Serbian, and Dalmatian territories), and Transylvania. Austria-Hungary was to lose the Bukovina and Galicia: the former would be shared between Romania and Russia, and the latter between Poland and Russia. The promises made to Serbia and Italy in 1915 were to be kept only in part. Italy's demands for the Tyrol and Gorizia were to be granted, but her claims to Istria and northern Dalmatia were to be turned down, on the grounds that these territories were vital to the Habsburg Empire. In the memorandum's view, the union of the various South-Slav territories of vastly different cultural background in a single state would have been an even greater mistake. Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and southern Dalmatia (up to Cattaro/Kotor) were to go to Serbia, but not those integral parts of Austria-Hungary inhabited mostly by Catholics. The nearly fifty-page document concluded: "After three years of war it is about time to think more about us and less about others; the glorious peace, so deserved by France, should not be delayed by minor details such as the more or less intransigent demands of the Serbs or the Romanians".[23]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was well aware of these two memoranda from the High Command; they eventually came to form the basis of the negotiations which France and the Entente conducted with Emperor Charles in 1917.

The pro-Austria-Hungary and pro-Habsburg notions put forward by the High Command and other conservatives and monarchists were strongly attacked both by Denis and Léger and by their radical free-thinking and to some degree Free Mason friends, as documented by François Fejtő. In his next book, written in 1917, Léger had harsh words for "naive Catholics who, confronted by a Lutheran Prussia, dreamt of an ultramontane Austria as a counterweight." Carrying on from his 1915 position, he drafted plans for a great pan-Slav confederation to be made up of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, with Romania and Greece having the option of joining. A Slav corridor running across western Hungary would have secured the connection between the northern and southern blocs. Instead of the narrow strip of land proposed by Denis in 1915, this Slav corridor gradually spread to a width of eighty to a hundred kilometres, with Lake Balaton as its eastern boundary.[24]

Denis also continued his propaganda campaign. "There is only one solution: the replacement of the Dualist Monarchy by a series of independent states, primarily the Serbo-Croat kingdom, which would be joined by the Slovenes, and which would extend to the right bank of the Danube; and the Czechoslovak state that would reach the left bank, flanked by Poland to the north and Russia to the east," he emphasised in a book on the Slovaks, published in 1917.[25]

The conference held by the Free Masonic Lodges of the Entente and neutral countries on 28–30 June, 1917, expressed views similar to those of Denis and Léger. Speaking at the Conference, André Lebey summed up the war aims endorsed by Free Masonry in four points. These were:
– the recovery of Alsace and Lorraine
– the restoration of the unity and independence of Poland
– the independence of Bohemia
– the liberation of the oppressed national minorities of Austria-Hungary, either within the state or in new states established by national referenda.[26]

Despite all the efforts by radicals, Slavophiles, Free Masons, and politicians representing Austro-Hungarian national minority exiles, the French government refused to commit itself to a definite policy on the future of the Danubian empire right up to the end of 1917. This is confirmed by Beneš's memorandum of December 12, 1917, on sabotage within Austria-Hungary, responding to a request from General Foch. Anticipating the failure to obtain a separate peace, the French High Command planned to organize sabotage on a grand scale in the Austro-Hungarian *Hinterland*. They hoped for the support of the national minorities. Showing some indignation, Beneš made it clear that he, as well as the other national minority representatives, wished to see the Entente follow a "clean and precise political course" in their dealings with Austria-Hungary. In their view, the Entente had deserted Serbia, Romania and the national minorities of Austria-Hungary, since it had argued for its "federal transformation" in negotiations for a separate peace. Why should they take risks, Beneš asked, when "these nations see the Entente hesitate to accept the principle of their national independence and that the statesmen of the Allied powers are engaged in a policy of coming to an arrangement, trying to make Austria understand that she can be saved, even favouring pacifist intrigue to her profit, trying to separate her from Germany."[27]

As far as Great Britain and the United States were concerned, Beneš's criticism was justified. In London and in Washington, the death-sentence on Austria-Hungary was not finally pronounced until the spring or summer of 1918.[28] In the case of France, however, Beneš's criticism was no longer justified, as the French government, after long hesitation, had finally made up its mind to support the division of the Habsburg Empire at that very time. This decisive move, which began in late 1917, was sparked off by two events: one was the October Revolution in Russia, with the result that France lost its most important continental ally, and the other was the change of government in France on November 17, in which Clemenceau returned as premier and Pichon as foreign minister. Unlike those they replaced, the two were both in favour of the dissolution of Austria-Hungary; the Russian revolution only confirmed them in their position.

The first obvious indication of the return to that idea and its elevation to government policy was the memorandum of November 26, 1917, from Pierre de Margerie, head of the Political Section at the Quai d'Orsay. This document dealt with the Polish question, or, to be more precise, it discussed whether a new Poland could contain Germany. However, the document also touched on the other countries of the region. It concluded that the most important eastern bastion in the defence against the threat of expansionism would be Poland, supported by an "enlarged Romania". The document then went on to suggest that the defence "against tentative German expansionism" could readily be complemented by "the establishment of

new states—likely to complete the bastion against German expansion on the eastern side." There can be no doubt that these new states were to be established on the territory of, and as a replacement for, Austria-Hungary. Still, Margerie fully recommended encouraging such a development. In the weeks that followed, the head of the Political Section repeatedly expanded on this idea in other contexts as well, adding that the new policy enjoyed the support not only of Pichon, but also that of Clemenceau and General Foch.[29]

Another indication of the change in French policy was the High Command's plan for wide-spread sabotage in Austria-Hungary; further confirmation came on December 16, 1917, when Pichon signed the decree on the establishment of a Czechoslovak army under the command of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris.

The new direction French policy took towards Austria-Hungary, in late 1917, was made final by three events in the spring of 1918: the separate peace between Germany and Russia, signed at Brest-Litovsk in March; the final collapse of separate peace negotiations with the Emperor Charles in April (the Sixtus Affair); and the agreement on close economic cooperation, pointing towards a tariff union, between Austria-Hungary and Germany and concluded in Spa on May 14-15, 1918. From the aspect of French national security, it would have been difficult to decide which of these three events was the most catastrophic. Not only did Russia withdraw from the war, she also gave a free hand to Germany in the Ukraine, the Baltic region and in Poland. Austria-Hungary was strengthening its ties with Germany rather than moving away. Everything seemed to justify the fears of Léger, Denis and their associates. Fence-sitting no longer made sense; the policy of the Quai d'Orsay became unequivocal and clear in late 1917, especially so after the spring of 1918. Drawing a laugh, Clemenceau summed up the essence of the new policy in the Senate on April 19, 1918: "Les Autrichiens sont un peuple en décomposition; ce sont d'aimables décomposés, ce ne sont pas des méchants gens...."[30]

In the spring of 1918, in line with her new policy, France asked her allies to include in their war aims (along with the sovereignty of Poland) the independence of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and the recognition of the Czechoslovak and South Slav exile committees as governments. (At the conference held in Rome in April 1918, the "oppressed nations" of Austria-Hungary put forward the same demand.) Due to delaying tactics on the part of Great Britain and the rigid opposition of Italy, which was concerned with Yugoslavia becoming a rival, France was unable to achieve this until the summer of 1918. In a joint declaration published on June 3, 1918, the European allies came out only for the independence of Poland. In the case of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, they continued to refrain from assuming concrete obligations, only going as far as assuring these peoples of the favourable view they took of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav national aspirations. Thus, on June 29, it was France alone which recognized the Czechoslovak National Council headed by Masaryk and Beneš as the official representative of the Czech and the Slovak nations and the basis of a future Czechoslovak government. Great Britain deferred doing so until August 9, and the United States waited still longer, until September 3. (As a result of an Italian veto, Yugoslavia was not granted similar recognition until the very end of the war.)[31]

In late 1918 and early 1919, following preliminary recognition of the potential

member states that were to make up the anti-German "bastion" zone in eastern Europe, France tried to ensure that her new allies in the Danube region would be strengthened and Austria and Hungary would be weakened. The new borders in the Danube Basin evidently resulted from a compromise between Czech, Romanian and South Slav politicians on the one hand, whose excessive claims openly disregarded the ethnic principle, and the American, Italian and British delegates on the other, whose more modest proposals had a higher regard for the actual ethnic proportions. Save for the wholly unjustifiable claims, such as the idea of a Slav corridor which even the French eventually abandoned, the French politicians and experts speaking at the plenary sessions and in the committee meetings of the peace conference either supported the various Czech, Romanian and Yugoslav demands or tried to act as arbitrators. For this reason, the lion's share of the blame for the fact that some ethnically Hungarian regions (such as the Csallóköz, the strip of land between Szatmárnémeti/Satu Mare and Nagyvárad/ Oradea, or the northern Bácska) were also detached from Hungary, rests with France. The crucial factors in the French approach concerned strategy and national security, with ethnic or economic considerations having much lower priority.[32]

It would be difficult to determine which one of the three Danubian countries was considered by France—whose main concern in Eastern Europe continued to be Poland—to have the greatest potential. Beneš undoubtedly had the best personal connections and inspired the greatest confidence in Paris; nevertheless, the new Greater Romania seemed to acquire the status of *primus inter pares*. From a strategic point of view, Paris looked on this country as the southern 'bastion of the Eastern European cordon sanitaire. In terms of economic importance, Romania was treated "as a virtual French colony of over fifteen million inhabitants, where we can develop our trade and industry". In culture, French politicians wanted to reorganize the entire educational system on the French pattern, attaching high hopes to the "intellectual education of Romanian youth".[33]

The new policy, which was consistently applied after late 1917, right up to the signing of the Hungarian peace treaty in June 1920, was briefly questioned only once: in the spring of 1920, following the Hungarian peace delegation's arrival in Paris, when bilateral talks were initiated with the French. The fact that the Hungarian initiative received a favourable reception partly resulted from personal changes at the top of the French government and partly derived from the new situation, as has been pointed out by a French historian, Pierre Renouvin, as well as by two Hungarians, Mária Ormos and Magda Ádám. The government which had endorsed, and implemented, the concept of radical change in the Danube Basin lost power in January 1920. Poincaré, Clemenceau and Pichon were replaced by politicians such as Dechanel, Millerand and Paléologue, who even in the final phase of the war were in sympathy with the idea of modernizing Austria-Hungary rather than its dismemberment. Naturally, the new leaders did not want to reverse its breakup, something that would have been impossible at that stage. They were, however, gravely concerned by the fact that the region's geographical centre, Hungary, was left out of the system of alliances emerging in the Danubian Basin, and that Hungary was receiving such unfair treatment at the peace conference. Therefore, the new leadership was willing to consider the Hungarian proposal offering substantial

economic and political concessions to France in return for allowing Hungary to keep those border regions which were overwhelmingly Hungarian.[34]

This was all, however, that the new leadership was willing to do in the matter of revising a policy, consistently implemented after the end of 1917. Indeed, it was by no means clear whether the will to go further existed at all. The Council of Ambassadors, meeting in London in response to Apponyi's speech in Paris and to memoranda submitted by the Hungarian peace delegation, discussed Hungary's new borders again at the very time secret Franco-Hungarian negotiations were taking place in Paris. A more consistent implementation of the ethnic principle was primarily supported by the Italian delegation; they favoured leaving the Csallóköz with Hungary and granting wide-ranging autonomy to the Székelyföld in Transylvania. Initially the British, too, (including Lloyd George) showed a willingness to modify the text of the peace agreement and the provisionally determined borders of Hungary. In contrast, the French delegation stood firmly by the earlier decisions of the peace conference to the very end. It should be pointed out, however, that France was represented in London by Philippe Berthelot, a close friend of Beneš's and an old acquaintance of both Denis and Léger. There is no reason to assume, however, that Berthelot advocated these views against the wishes of his new superiors. His detailed reports[35] on the progress of the negotiations arrived on Paléologue's desk every morning; had Paléologue wished to do so, he would have no doubt instructed Berthelot to modify his unyielding views. Berthelot never received such instructions, probably for very good reasons. This silence can be explained by the fact that the new French government envisaged economic cooperation and political reconciliation between Hungary and her new neighbours as basically falling within the framework of the Treaty of Trianon. (The necessity for such a reconciliation was given a growing emphasis in the spring of 1920.) In addition, the letter appended to the peace agreement shows that the partnership of Millerand and Paléologue was just as reluctant to go further than vague promises as their predecessors had been. The approach is reflected in the instructions issued by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ambassadors between March and June, 1920, generally signed by Paléologue himself.[36] My conclusion is, therefore, that no reversal or significant modification took place in France's foreign policy on the Danube region; all that happened was that the possibility of revising these policies was considered—without any consequences or corrections.

No substantial revisions were made during the next fifteen years either. The two cornerstones of France's policy towards Hungary (and the Danubian Region in general) were the observation of the Treaty of Trianon and the prevention of a Habsburg restoration. Nothing changed right up to the last third of the 1930s, when the East-European "bastion" established in 1919-1920 was rendered completely ineffective by the dynamism of the reviving German economy, producing a scenario that the French High Command had warned about back in 1917. The small nations of the region engaged in ruthless competition for the benefits offered by the German market, and consequently for Germany's political goodwill as well, regardless of sympathies or good relations established earlier. With the re-emergence of the dreaded *Mitteleuropa*, the fundamentals of the new European order drawn up in 1919-1920 became questionable in part, and in part lost significance; at the

same time, the guarantees to the states of the Little Entente gave way to schemes aiming at the integration of the entire region. On November 19, 1939, the Hungarian Minister in Paris reported: "The intention to weaken Germany was also manifested in their plans to organize the East-European states with the aim of forming a counter-weight against Germany. Their starting point is that the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was the gravest mistake of the Treaty of Versailles, and that after the current war a substitute arrangement must be found to replace it. This problem is attracting much attention in political circles here, although no one really knows what should be done. Some kind of a federation is envisaged, involving Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and the other Central and South-East European states, ourselves included."[37] It is worth noting that within this federal arrangement, Hungary's claims to territory in Czechoslovakia and Romania were received in a more favourable light—as early as from 1938 onwards.[38] In view of the fact, however, that France was not in a position to implement her ideas regarding the future of the Danube Region at that time, nor after the war for that matter, this view, partially interpretable as self-criticism, had no political significance whatsoever, and is interesting purely from the perspective of the history of ideas. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Louis Léger: *La renaissance tchèque au dix-neuvième siècle*. Paris, 1911. p. 208.

2 ■ *ibid.*: *La Save, le Danube et le Balkan*. Paris, 1884. pp. 19 and 86–87.

3 ■ *ibid.* (1911) X-XI. pp. 225–226.

4 ■ Quoted by François Fejtő in: *Requiem pour un empire défunt*. Paris, 1988. p. 352.

5 ■ André Chéradame: *L'Europe et la question d'Autriche au seuil du XXe siècle*. Paris, 1901. pp. 414–425.

6 ■ Edmond Adam: *Patrie hongroise*. Paris, 1884. Discussed in detail, along with the author's other works, by István Lelkes in: *A magyar–francia barátság aranykora 1879–1889* (The Golden Age of Franco–Hungarian Friendship 1879–1889). Budapest, 1932. pp. 127–206.

7 ■ Jules Chopin: *L'Autriche-Hongrie. "Brillant second"*. Paris, 1917. p. 10.

8 ■ Louis Léger: *La liquidation de l'Autriche-Hongrie*. Paris, 1915. p. 10.

9 ■ Ernest Denis: *La Grande Serbie*. Paris, 1915. p. 307.

10 ■ Louis Léger: *ibid.* (1915). pp. 11–12.

11 ■ Ernest Denis: *La guerre*. Paris, 1915. pp. 333–342.

12 ■ Ernest Denis: *La Grande Serbie*. p. 302.

13 ■ Edith Marjanovic: *Die Habsburger Monarchie in Politik und öffentlicher Meinung Frankreichs 1914–1918*. Wien–Salzburg, 1984. pp. 19–25.

14 ■ François Fejtő: *op. cit.* pp. 312, 356, 358–359. Cf. Bernard Michel: "Le rôle d'Ernest Denis et du journal *La nation tchèque* dans la naissance de la Tchéchoslovaquie" and Bohumila Ferencuhova: "Les slavisants français et le mouvement tchèchoslovaque à l'étranger au cours de la Première Guerre Mondiale". In. *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*. 169. (1993). pp. 17–36.

15 ■ Kalervo Hovi: *Cordon sanitaire ou barrière de l'Est?* Turku, 1975. pp. 32–33.

16 ■ See for more detail, Edith Marjanovic: *op. cit.* pp. 30–56.

17 ■ Kalervo Hovi: *op. cit.* p. 40.

18 ■ The following passage clearly identifies the author: "During the course of that summer, we were struck by Count Tisza's efforts to reconcile the Romanians of Transylvania with Hungary. [...] the study we prepared on this subject was overtaken by events and was confiscated by the police." Archives Diplomatiques, Paris (in the following: AD). Guerre 1914–1918.

Autriche-Hongrie. Vol. 149. Note sur l'état d'esprit des nationalités d'Autriche-Hongrie, 31.12.1914.

19 ■ Kalervo Hovi: *op.cit.* pp. 41, 43; Edith Marjanovic: *op.cit.* pp. 58–63; David Kelly: "Woodrow Wilson and the Creation of Czechoslovakia." In: *East European Quarterly*, June 1991. pp. 185–207. Furthermore, Zbynek Zeman: *The Masaryks: The Making of Czechoslovakia*. London, 1990. pp. 89–90.

20 ■ Edith Marjanovic: *op. cit.* pp. 59–60.

21 ■ *AD Guerre. 1914–1918. Autriche–Hongrie.* Vol. 150. La situation militaire, politique et économique de l'Autriche-Hongrie en commencement de 1917. 7.03.0907.

22 ■ François Fejtő: *op. cit.* p. 312.

23 ■ *AD Guerre. 1914–1918. Autriche–Hongrie.* Vol. 150. *La situation politique en Autriche-Hongrie et ses consequences.* 23.07.1917.

24 ■ Louis Léger: *Le Panslavisme et l'Intérêt français.* Paris, 1917. pp. 317–329.

25 ■ Ernest Denis: *La question d'Autriche et les Slovaques.* Paris, 1917. pp. 37–38.

26 ■ See for more detail, Edith Marjanovic: *op.cit.* pp. 85–86 and François Fejtő: *op. cit.* pp. 341–342.

27 ■ *AD Guerre 1914–1918. Autriche–Hongrie.* Vol. 152. *Note de Beneš.* 12.12.1917.

28 ■ On December 4, 1917 the British prime minister Lloyd George still said: 'Nous ne souhaitons pas affaiblir ni transformer la monarchie austro-hongroise; seulement la delivrer de l'influence allemande". (Cited in François Fejtő: *op.cit.* p. 364.) Also, in April 1918, Charles Seymour, the Central Europe specialist of the United States' Peace Committee, was still working on plans for the federal transformation of Austria-Hungary. (National Archives, Washington D.C. RG 256. Inquiry.)

29 ■ Kalervo Hovi: *op. cit* pp. 71–75.

30 ■ Quoted in: Edith Marjanovic: *op. cit.* p. 127.

31 ■ Kalervo Hovi: *op. cit.* pp. 129–131.

32 ■ See for more details: Francis Deák: *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference.* New York, 1941; and Mária Ormos: *Padovától Trianonig* (From Padua to Trianon). Budapest, 1983.

33 ■ *AD Europe 1918–1944. Roumanie.* Vol. 32. A memorandum written by Lacombe on December 12, 1918, and a report sent by Berthelot on January 9, 1919.

34 ■ Pierre Renouvin: "Aux origines de la Petit Entente. Les hésitations de la politique française dans l'été 1920." In: *Études Européennes. Mélanges offerts à Victor L. Tapié.* Paris, 1973. pp. 489–500.; and Mária Ormos: "Francia-magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban" (Franco–Hungarian Negotiations in 1920). In: *Századok*, 1975/65–6. pp. 904–949; Magda Ádám: "Dunai konföderáció vagy kisantant" (Danubian Confederation or Little Entente). *Történelmi Szemle*, 1977/3-4. pp. 440–448.

35 ■ *AD Internationale Y, 1918–1940.* Vol. 662.

36 ■ For example, *AD Europe 1918–1940. Hongrie.* Vol. 46. Millerand's instructions issued on March 6, 1920, to the chief representative assigned to Hungary; and Vol. 59. Paléologue's briefing to French ambassadors on June 22, 1920.

37 ■ *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához.* 1936–1945. (Diplomatic Documents Pertaining to Hungary's Foreign Policy. 1936–1945). Vol. IV. Ed. Gyula Juhász. Budapest, 1962. p. 620.

38 ■ *Ibid.* Vol. II. pp. 271–272 and 858–859; Vol. III. pp. 111–112; and Vol. IV. p. 541.

György Kocsis

The Distant Lights of the European Union

An Interview with Endre Juhász

One of the yardsticks by which the new Social-Liberal coalition will be measured at the end of its term, four years hence, is likely to be whether it will have been able to meet its promise of taking Hungary to the very threshold of joining the European Union. Endre Juhász, 50, was appointed in the post-elections reshuffle as Secretary of State and President of the Office of European Affairs, operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Earlier, he had played a leading role in working out the Association Agreement between Hungary and the EU.

Q. *The new government programme includes plans for the "further development" of the Association Agreement, its "revision and amendment if necessary" so that "the association might be more advantageous to the Hungarian economy than it has thus far been". Should this be understood as implied criticism of the Association Agreement?*

E. J. When the Association Agreement was signed in 1991, I had a feeling myself that the country's position could be improved further, even though some two thirds of Hungary's industrial products were exempted from customs duties by the Community. As a result of further negotiations, in June 1993, the Community took new measures to shorten the timetable for lifting customs barriers against Hungarian exports towards the Community: customs duties for 93 "sensitive" products would be abolished two years ahead of the original plan, that is, by December 31, 1994, and those levied on steel and textile products a year earlier than planned, at the end of 1995 and 1996 respectively. With the negotiations advancing as rapidly as they do, if we were to initiate some sort of acceleration in this area, the barriers would fall of themselves by the time we got anywhere at all. Therefore I can see no possibility for further improvement for industrial products. The situation is different in the agricultural sector, where the Association Agreement did not envisage free trade even in the long run, and all it included was customs duty and import levy preferences, though these involve at least two thirds of our agricultural exports. In the meantime, the Uruguay Round of GATT, which covers all of world trade, has ended: the member governments have agreed on the elimination of the non-tariff barriers, or on their tariffication in agricultural

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trade. Since the Association Agreement was made on the basis of the old trade policy system— according to which the EU operates a system of import levies and Hungary an import licence system— the mutual concessions will now have to be transformed. Another important point is to carry over into the Association Agreement the concession in the agricultural trade agreement that we have with the four EFTA nations which are now joining the EU. While discussing them, we will try to enlarge those concessions.

Q. When are discussions on this to begin?

E. J. They will have to begin this autumn, and will hopefully be finished this year, although there is no guarantee for that, given the speed at which the Union works. The speed also depends on whether results of the Uruguay Round of GATT and the accession of the EFTA countries will actually come into effect on January 1 next year, since the agreements will have to be first ratified by the parliaments of the countries involved.

Q. Significant pressure is expected from Socialist politicians and from some leaders of industry—Suzuki, for instance—that the asymmetry in favour of Hungary already present in the Association Agreement should be widened by protection measures limiting imports. Are these ideas realistic?

E. J. Clearly, competition can be expected to intensify as our own obligations gradually come into force. Up to now, a quarter of the industrial imports from the EU have been duty-free. From 1995 on, however, the abolition of customs duties on "sensitive" products will begin. My own personal opinion—since no government position has been taken on this yet—is that any restriction on imports can be considered only within the framework of the protection measures allowed by the Association Agreement; any other attempt on our part would run into very strong resistance and would fail; it would also fundamentally upset our timetable for integration. On the other hand, there are possibilities for taking measures against dumping, subsidies and market disruptions, for the protection of infant industries or industries undergoing restructuring, as well as for the protection of sectors where serious social problems might occur. We have been negotiating for more than one year now with the EU on measures of this kind which concern 17 products—I am not at liberty to name them, but they account for a mere 2 per cent of our imports from the EU—and these negotiations are likely to end in a compromise. It is, indeed, a question of interpretation as to what should be considered, for instance, an industry undergoing restructuring. The EU will accept such a restriction only if we have a specific programme to support our claim that an industry is actually being structurally transformed: that is, inefficient capacities are being eliminated, new investments made, and products and technologies modernized. It is not enough for a manufacturer simply to say that his activities are adversely affected by imports.

Q. In disputes of this kind, the justice of the Hungarian claims would be judged by the very people who may suffer disadvantage as a consequence of the outcome. Who can guarantee the impartiality of the decisions?

E. J. One must come to terms with the fact that the objective of economic diplomacy is not the quest for justice but the reconciliation of interests. There is no third power above Hungary and the EU to which appeal could be made. These negotiations,

Hungary and the European Union

During the sixties Hungary's relationship with the European Economic Community was characterized by tension and even confrontation. Hungary, under the political influence of the Soviet Union and complying with the requirements of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), did not recognize the Community as an entity under international law and as a new political factor on the international scene. Soon, however, this policy proved to be counter-productive: without normal relations Hungary's trade and economic interests were harmed. During the seventies the country tried to adjust to reality; while still opposing a comprehensive trade agreement, the Hungarian Government was ready to conclude agreements in specific sectors (certain agricultural products, steel, textile and apparel). After the failure of the negotiations between the CMEA and the Community, Hungary felt free to go ahead on its own. Accordingly, in 1988 it established diplomatic relations with the Community and concluded a trade and economic cooperation agreement which was intended to govern a wide range of issues. This agreement, however, just meant the normalisation of the relations.

After Hungary committed itself to the establishment of a pluralistic democracy and market economy, the Community decided to offer a relationship of a new quality. In April 1990, at its Dublin summit, the leaders of the Twelve declared their readiness to establish an association with Hungary and with two other countries of Central Europe, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Following exploratory discussions, official negotiations for the conclusion of the Association Agreement, later called the Europe Agreement, began in December 1990 in Brussels. While there was agreement at the level of political intentions and objectives, reconciliation of conflicting trade and economic interests turned out to be extremely difficult. The discussions, in ten negotiating rounds, had gone through several "crisis" situations. The major sources of difficulties were market access for sensitive Hungarian industrial products, agricultural concessions, movement of labour, establishment by Community nationals and companies in Hungary, financial assistance from the Community and the extent of the asymmetry (how long to postpone the implementation of Hungarian commitments).

therefore, are a highly intensive struggle about who can argue better. And if we run out of arguments, we must accept that our claim will not "go through".

Q. Two years have passed since the entry into force of the trade provisions of the Association Agreement, and although the year 1992 saw fairly good results in foreign trade, last year Hungary's export trade all but collapsed. That seems to support the critics of the agreement, who argue that the EU has profited a great deal more from the association than Hungary has.

Moreover, the Community seemed reluctant to regard the Association Agreement as a preparatory phase toward full integration and to accept reference to Hungary's membership in the text of the agreement. The Commission conducting the negotiations for the Community twice had to ask for a new or modified negotiating mandate from the Council.

By November 1991 the negotiators had gradually formulated the compromise solutions; the agreement was initialled on 22 November 1991, then signed on 16 December 1991. The Europe Agreement is designed:

- *to set up institutionalized political dialogue aiming at an increasing convergence of positions;*
- *to establish a free trade area between Hungary and the Community in industrial products by the end of the year 2000, to provide mutual preferential market access and concessions in agricultural trade;*
- *to make progress towards realizing between the Parties the other economic freedoms on which the Community is based (freedom of movement of services, labour and capital, right of establishment)*
- *to promote economic, financial and cultural cooperation on the widest possible basis*
- *to support Hungary's efforts to develop its economy and to complete the conversion into a market economy.*

The preamble of the agreement states that "the final objective of Hungary is to become a member of the Community and that this association, in the view of the Parties, will help to achieve this objective."

The trade and trade-related provisions of the Europe Agreement, by means of an interim agreement, have been in force since 1 March 1992, while the Association Agreement itself—after a long ratification process by member states—entered into force on 1 February 1994.

At their Copenhagen summit meeting in June 1993, the Community leaders decided to grant accelerated liberalization for the products of the associated countries and confirmed that they share their objective of becoming members of the Community.

On 1 November 1993 the Maastricht Treaty entered into force and the European Union was born.

On 31 March 1994 Hungary formally submitted its application for membership in the European Union.

E. J. The agreement cannot create goods that can compete in the market. True, earlier on we used to be more optimistic about the performance of the Hungarian economy. The situation is well illustrated by the fact that, last year, Hungary was able to fill, on average, only 30 per cent of its quotas for textile and clothing exports to the EU. On the other hand, however, that may also indicate that our negotiating tactics were not bad at all: we wanted to achieve quotas as large as possible. Here is an element which is always somewhat contradictory: if we are able to utilize the

quota to the full, it may mean that the negotiators were not successful enough, if the quotas remain unexploited, then the economic leadership may come under criticism. Nevertheless, the advantages of the agreement are shown in the fact that a growing proportion of Hungary's exports go to the EU countries. In 1992, when there was still an upswing in exports, Hungarian exports to the EU increased 14.4 per cent in value, against an increase of 7.4 per cent of our total exports; but this figure might also be compared to the 3.1 per cent growth of our exports to the EFTA countries or the 6.3 per cent growth in Hungarian exports to the United States. In the first half of 1994, the growth of Hungarian total exports was 7.8 per cent, but growth in our exports to the Union was 13.7 per cent. There are many Hungarian companies which would have practically gone out of business without the Association Agreement, since the EU countries had been maintaining heavy restrictions on their products.

Q. *According to some critics, the agreement is too restrictive regarding the so-called rules of origin. Hungarian goods cannot be delivered duty free to the EU unless the value of Hungarian content in them is at least 60 per cent. This prevents Hungary, they object, from increasing exports by processing material purchased cheaply in the East.*

E. J. The goal of both parties is that concessions should be enjoyed by products manufactured in the countries involved. It is not in our interest to lose customs revenues while, say, all kinds of goods from Hong-Kong could be imported from an EC country duty free. This would simply mean abusing the free trade agreement. It might perhaps be profitable temporarily, but its long term economic effects are dubious. The present rules encourage foreign investors moving their operations to Hungary to rely heavily on Hungarian labour and suppliers if they want to export to the countries of the EU. This is highly desirable from the point of view of job creation. On the basis of the rules of origin, imports from the EU countries are treated as "originating" products, i.e. "Hungarian" products. Therefore the so called cumulation is possible. However, the critics are right to say that the EFTA countries are excluded from this cumulation, even though we have free trade agreements with them. Fortunately, this problem will be solved when the EFTA countries join the EU. But negotiations should continue to ensure cumulation with the Visegrad countries.

Q. *The government programme includes efforts to tap the financial resources of the EU to a greater extent than so far. What are the chances?*

E. J. I do not think that we can achieve an increase on a major scale. We have already received annually about 100 million ECUs of non-repayable grants within the PHARE programme, I hope this figure will grow by an annual 10 per cent until 1999. Although PHARE is frequently criticized, I am convinced that the majority of the objectives financed by it thus far have been useful. Who could deny, for instance, that a market economy needs a well functioning stock exchange, an adequate customs organization, statistical system or quality testing institutes? All these institutions have received heavy support from PHARE. It is a fact, though, that we would like to see certain changes: a greater role for the Hungarian government in decisions regarding the use of funds; plans should be made in terms of not one but several years ahead, and a growing share of the

money should be spent on projects that genuinely develop the economy, encourage investment and improve the infrastructure.

Q. *Some critics maintain the PHARE programme was nothing but a source of huge fees for Western advisors. Cases are mentioned when the Hungarian authorities, at the urging of the EU, had one more study or investigation made even though they had known for a long time what the solution should be—but the money had to be spent not on that solution but on paying the experts sent by the EU.*

J. E. It has to be admitted, though, that in many areas there simply is a shortage of Hungarian specialists who are fully fluent in a foreign language and who have a proper knowledge of market economies and adequate contacts with institutions and companies in the West. I doubt that, for instance, in privatization, we could have advanced as far as we have without the assistance of foreign advisors. On the other hand, it cannot be denied, that a certain self-interest is manifest on the part of the Union. There might be occasions when the Community, on launching an aid programme, does take care that it should also create opportunities for business for its own companies. But that applies not only to the European Union. Other donor countries do the same.

Q. *On April 1, 1994 the previous government submitted its application for membership in the EU. However, the criteria for full membership are not set out anywhere. Some of the present members had fully-fledged modern economies when they joined, while others—Spain, for instance—managed to catch up during the ten-year transition process. How high is the hurdle that Hungary has to clear?*

E. J. Hungary is a third variant. By the time of its accession, which is expected around the year 2000, it must reach a certain level of integration, and the rest of the road may be covered within the walls of the Union, with temporary exemption from certain of the criteria. Full membership, in fact, means, that the member country undertakes to adopt, within a foreseeable time, the complete legal system and policies of the EU. The exemptions that we are likely to need are outlined in a memorandum submitted to the European Commission just after our application for membership. We will obviously have to ask for exemption from certain requirements laid down in the common agricultural policy. There is a wide gap between the levels of guaranteed prices in Hungary and the Union. However, this gap might narrow in the future as a consequence of both the reform of the common agricultural policy, leading to lower guaranteed rices and of the trend for higher agricultural prices in Hungary.

In all likelihood, capital flow will also be an exception. I do not believe that we will be able to completely liberalize the outflow of capital from Hungary in any foreseeable time. But even in the area of capital inflow it is quite conceivable that the Hungarian government will want to retain procedures for the individual licensing of banks and insurance companies for some time to come. We will probably ask for exemption from a number of technical, environmental and health requirements as well. The mutual flow of labour is not likely to become unrestricted all at once, especially if the Visegrád nations are admitted at the same time. And we will, in all probability, ask for provisional exemption from the so-called Maastricht criteria, among which are that the budget deficit of an EU country must not, in the future, be more than 3 per cent of GDP, the national debt not more than 60 per cent of GDP, and the

inflation rate must not exceed the average of the three best-performing countries by more than 1.5 per cent. At the same time we are certain to be specially treated by the EU in the allocation of the so-called structural funds: if they do not want— nor should we want, in the interest of our admission—that our accession should impose unbearable financial burdens on them, then they must apply for a transition period different conditions to us than they do to the present members or to the EFTA countries that are now joining.

Q. Some experts say that the difficulty of the former socialist countries have in joining is increased because they have to shoot at a moving target: they must accept that they have to adopt the entire system of the Union and all its conditions at a time when those conditions are changing along the way in an unknown direction. And prospective new members having no influence on the modifications at all. How can you negotiate successfully in such circumstances?

E. J. Well, the target does not really move all that much. The essence of integration is well known, and its evolution can be largely foreseen. The decisive factor for Hungary is that we have to move closer. We have made it clear, for instance, that we will not accept a standard such as Hungary's having the same per capita GDP as the EU average, or a given percentage of it, but the existing gap should not widen. Nor is it entirely true that we have no influence on the conditions of our joining. It was, for instance, in the process of their joining that the EFTA countries made the Union accept the notion of "Northern agriculture", and managed to win special conditions for themselves. No doubt, basically, we must speak about Hungary's unilateral adaptation, but we would have to adapt to the single European market even if we were to stay outside. So it is better to get inside somehow, and then—even if to a modest degree—influence developments.

Q. The internal relations of the EU are also complex; the Germans and the British, for instance, take a friendlier attitude to our joining the Union than do the French. What causes these differences?

E. J. Undoubtedly, Germany's position has always been clearly pro-integration, although it does have certain contrary interests, for example, in agriculture. In addition, it shoulders the greatest financial burden within the Union, thus it must think twice about the new financial obligations the Union would undertake as a consequence of its enlargement toward the East. The British government is sometimes accused of supporting the enlargement of the EU only because it would like the Community to move from a federal-type integration toward a form which has a greater respect for the authority of the nation-states. France, on the other hand, is wary of possible competition from Hungary's agricultural exports. The southern wing—Spain, Portugal and Greece—has thus far assured us of their full political support, although there may be a certain amount of fear in these countries that we would take too much of the structural funds, to their disadvantage. For us there is no point in taking sides in these disputes—in fact we must not do so. It is a favourable development that, as the resolutions of the recent EU summit in Corfu have shown, our admission is now treated as an accepted prospect, and the question is *only* when and on what conditions it will be accomplished. I believe that Austria's membership, in 1995, helps Hungary a lot, since the admission of a country without any common border with the EU would hardly have been conceivable.

Q. Does the person of the new President of the Brussels Commission, Jacques Santers, mean an advantage or a drawback from the point of view of our admission?

E. J. That is very hard to tell, for it also depends on what sort of shape the new Europe is going to take—and at this moment, there appears to be a slight movement away from federalism. On the basis of M. Santers' record, one has the feeling that he may not have the same large vision about Europe as Jacques Delors had; on the other hand, he promises to be more pragmatic, more of a technocrat. His character, his readiness to seek compromises, may turn out to be highly favourable from our point of view. ❧

Kálmán Mizsei

Recipes for Growth

The crucial problems in the economy have been interpreted in a somewhat distorted way in Hungary, due partly to the electoral campaign in the first half of 1994. Furthermore, economists have tended to interpret the general lessons of the transition too narrowly, not taking into account the experience of other transitional economies, such as those of Poland and the Czech Republic. In 1993 the problems of macroeconomic disequilibrium intensified—the budget and current account deficits reached worrying levels and the special bank and enterprise bail-out operations (a mechanism, which restored subsidies) added another more than US$3 bn to the national debt. Yet, the economic profession, instead of pressing the politicians to focus on macroeconomic problems, was preoccupied with the lack of economic growth in a situation when industrial recovery was already very robust indeed; the philosophy of a "half-turn" gained momentum. Added to this, in the 1994 parliamentary elections the party gaining a sweeping victory was that which represents in the eyes of the public a more generous redistribution of the common pie.

The worst long-term, structural problem of the Hungarian economy is the heavy state debt. Hungarian policy-makers need to define the optimal economic policy mix by taking account of this problem and yet trying to achieve a (sustainable) economic growth for the long run. The announced policy of the minister of finance, László Békesi, is based on four correct, and given the voting base of the government, courageous premises. First, the recent size of the Hungarian budget deficit threatens us with the debt getting out of control in 1995. Therefore urgent and short-term corrections are needed. Second, with the recent level of institutional maturity of the economy, the fight against inflation makes it imperative not only to cut the budget deficit but also to take administrative measures to control the growth of nominal wages and to achieve a negative real wage index in 1995. Thirdly, a condition of sustainable economic growth is the expansion of exports. Finally, solidly based growth also presupposes a regulatory environment which aggressively encourages savings as against consumption. The joint and consequent combination and reconciliation of these four policy principles could deal

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with the decades long dilemma of the Hungarian economy between the goals of equilibrium and growth.

The Kádárist dilemma

Policy-makers must realize that the above dilemma can be handled: in fact, the really successful economies in the contemporary world (the most obvious examples are Japan and Germany) can satisfy the requirements of growth and macroeconomic balance simultaneously. In Hungary this false—from the point of view of long-term success—dilemma is rooted in the political history of Kádárism. The growth model of socialist Hungary was exhausted in the 1970s. After that the Kádárist philosophy, born in fear of a repetition of 1956, tried to deal with the dilemma by allowing overconsumption instead of the economically more rational alternative of dynamic systemic reforms. (On the other hand, for Hungary the Ceausescu-type "solution", i.e. drastic cuts in consumption for the purpose of keeping investments high, was obviously not available either.) This policy inevitably pulled the country into the trap of external indebtedness. The great burden of the post-communist period is that, after the taxi drivers' blockade against certain price measures in late 1990, the Antall government also became "Kádárist", that is, it postponed and never in practice realized the necessary reforms concerning major items in the budget and thus could not reduce the budgetary deficit.

In the current situation the country's deficit cannot exceed the level where the national debt would further grow in proportion to the GDP. In fact, the government should start to massage down the debt as soon as the economy starts on a solid economic growth course. A very recent study by the World Bank reckons that if there are no urgent budgetary adjustments, inflation could get out of control and reach the level of 50 per cent by 1996. This shows the urgency of stopping overspending and, in a broader perspective, of discontinuing the Kádárist heritage of economic policy thinking.

The magnitude of the budgetary adjustment in the government's original programme is not at all unique in an international perspective. The obvious example in Eastern Europe is the Polish stabilization in 1990. In Hungary it is rarely mentioned, because it does not fit into the Hungarian stereotypes, that in Poland, after eighteenth months from the beginning of the stabilization programme, industry started its robust growth; since then Poland has had the fastest growing industry in Europe. Although this growth started at a very low level and was supported by a generous restructuring of Poland's international debt, what we need to focus on is the dynamics of the process. Without any particular growth stimuli, with a "simple minded" monetarist policy, Poland was able to turn around and make its economy more dynamic. Something similar has happened in the Czech Republic: again, no growth stimuli but a very consistent effort to maintain macroeconomic equilibrium and to keep wages at competitive levels was sufficient to contain the decline of GDP in 1993 and to achieve a healthy growth in 1994.

Hungary does not need a budgetary and wage correction of the magnitude of the Polish shock therapy of 1990. To some extent the international conditions for policy correction are better now than in the last couple of years, as the economies of main European trading partners (Germany, Austria and Italy) have started to grow again. Thus for Hungary it will be enough to apply a more modest dose of the Polish recipe to overcome the false dilemma of macroeconomic balance or growth.

Shrinking real wages

If the four policy principles listed above drive economic policy in the next years, from 1996 the Hungarian economy will be able to grow without threatening the requirements of macroeconomic equilibrium. Why are shrinking real wages inevitable in order to achieve growth? Explaining this to the public will be the most crucial task of the new Socialist-led Hungarian government. In the election campaign it was only László Békesi who painted a realistic picture of the state of the economy; most of the others left the people under the false impression that falling real wages in the early 1990s were due to the erratic policies of the Antall and Boross governments. Contrary to this illusion, the truth is that after the justified restrictions of 1990–91, Hungarian economic policy became too lax and thus started to undermine the reserves not only of the day but also of the future.

The budgetary adjustment measures need to be accompanied by income policies for several reasons. Real wages have increased in 1994 due to the lax income policies of the Boross government in the period before the elections. This cries for an adjustment, otherwise the unfavourable recent trends in inflation and in the current account could be reversed only through an overlong period. Besides this, income policy measures would improve the short-term competitiveness and liquidity position of the enterprise sector and thus the number of bankruptcies would be fewer, and in turn the pressure on the government to bail out troubled banks and enterprises would be less severe. As mentioned earlier, national debt has increased by more than US$3 bn in consequence of such bail-out operations in the past three years. This practice has generated rent seeking behaviour in the enterprise sector and in an indirect way has restored subsidization in the economy. As the Polish and Czech examples clearly show, in a transitional economy the most efficient short-term way to lower the rate of inflation is cutting real wages, thus squeezing domestic demand and breaking inflationary expectations. In the recent Hungarian debates, anti-inflationary policies are often portrayed as the obsession of selfish technocrats. In reality there is no more "efficient" source of socially unjust polarization of wealth than inflation, since different social groups have highly differing access to protective instruments against the rapid growth in prices. The desire to push down inflation to one digit levels is not a technocratic obsession, but is dictated by a sense of genuine social responsibility. The example of the Czech Republic shows that this is not an unachievable goal, but politicians need courage to take measures which will be unpopular in the short run.

Both successful post-socialist stabilizations, the Polish and Czech ones, energetically used the weapon of restrictive income policy. One should look with special attention at the Czech example: against advice to the contrary and loud social demagogy, Klaus contained the growth of nominal wages with an iron hand, often resorting to very tough administrative measures. The result of the sustained efforts of the past three years appear now: the curve of the inflation rate in the Czech Republic has separated from the Hungarian one for the first time since the economic transition in the region started; it will be around 10 per cent in 1994.

Czech economic policy does not fit into the Hungarian stereotypes and therefore it is being somewhat misinterpreted: Hungarian economists repeat again and again that in the Czech Republic "restructuring has not yet started". I think this is a half truth: the Czechs have indeed chosen a

more cautious path of structural reform than the Hungarians in many respects and the sequencing of different reform measures is also different. However, for us, Hungarians, it is more important to concentrate on that half of the Czech story from which we can learn a positive message. Against all the gloomy predictions, the sustained balancing of the budget and holding down of wages have created the fundamentals for healthy and sustainable Czech economic growth. Thanks to a consistent monetarist economic policy, the Czech economy has started on a growth path which will soon catapult them (besides the Poles) into the vanguard of economic growth in Europe. One may well wonder which approach is more "socially sensitive": one which leads to further accumulation of the debt mountain, claiming that the social burden of transition would otherwise be unbearable, and thus narrows the long-run chances for growth, or one which, in the period of transition to a market economy, also helps to improve competitiveness through the instruments of income policy and thus generates higher growth and, consequently, higher levels of employment. (The low level of unemployment in the Czech Republic is not only the function of slow restructuring but also of higher competitiveness due to held-down wages.)

It is true that the Czechs, like the Poles, were in a sense in a better starting position than Hungary, since they started the era of bold economic reforms without significant debts. However, repeating this truth does not help much: the task ahead of us is to find a solution in this more difficult situation instead of making things worse. My conviction is that the governing coalition must try to hammer together a broad social pact around the necessary adjustment measures. The socialists may get encouragement from the fact that the most obvious historical example, the Moncloa Pact secured the leading role of he Socialist Party in the Spanish modernization for an extended period of time. The Hungarian agreement should harmonize the three goals of sustained growth, macroeconomic equilibrium (which also means steadily diminishing inflation) and growing real wages. At the same time, this pact should not get the country into the trap of a strong trend towards corporativism because this would, in the longer run, jeopardize economic and social modernization even if in the short run it could reconcile the three goals. At the same time the opposition parties, in spite of their relative weakness in the current parliament, should be involved in the drafting of a broad national pact; this would help the development of democracy and would be beneficial to the governing parties.

What the trade unions have to consider is that, in case of growing macroeconomic disequilibrium, real wages inevitably decline in the long run—as many international examples, including that of some neighbouring post-communist economies—clearly indicate. Many laymen ask if it could be the other way around, i.e. first increase real wages and then adjust the production. However, that is exactly what has happened in Hungary since the middle of 1993 with the well-known result of growing macroeconomic tensions. Society has to pay a heavy price for this: economic policy is forced to step on the brake and make more painful adjustments than it would do if previous policy had been more cautious.

Export oriented growth from 1996

In the case of a small economy it is clear that exports should be the motor of long term growth. Some analysts try to achieve this first of all through frequent devalua-

tions. A much more intelligent, and again more beneficial, approach is to force export growth by a good mixture of strict and predictable macroeconomic policy, competitive wages and appropriately set exchange rates. On the other hand it is important that the economic policy does not fall into the mistake of the macroeconomic policies of 1992–93: then the exchange rate policy had to bear a disproportionate burden in the anti-inflationary fight, since fiscal policy was irresponsibly expansive.

The Békesi programme now offers a chance to put the Hungarian economy on a sustained growth path. However, the path is going to be long and thorny. A large number of politicians in the governing party still do not want to face the realities of the Hungarian economy. They are still voting down the painful measures suggested by the Minister of Finance thereby making the period of adjustment longer than necessary, consequently the economic recovery will be modest even in 1996. Macroeconomic austerity measures will thus be inevitable even in this period. Moreover, the difficulty with which the necessary short-term measures are born makes all the more burdensome the task of concentrating on solutions which can enable the state to disengage partly from the social welfare systems. ❧

Gábor Halász

Schooling and Social Change

In the summer of 1993, parliament passed a set of three acts on higher education, schooling and vocational training. The main goal was to adjust education to a subtler, more pluralistic view of social structure, to the needs of a parliamentary democracy and a market economy. Legislation was meant to strengthen a process of transformation started earlier, and to impel entirely new changes. The following will attempt to outline the current situation and the changes taking place in public education in Hungary in the light of these laws.

The past of schooling was determined by the country's social and political system, by its belonging to the Soviet bloc. Education was, for decades, subordinated to the demands of a planned economy, that is, to the labour needs arising from forced industrialization and to the need to spread Marxism, the dominant ideology. At the same time, however, the development of the school system and the raising of educational standards was always given high priority. As a result, the system of schooling that emerged was fairly highly developed, but, from many respects, distorted and ill-suited to the needs of a modern, open society.

Compulsory schooling begins in Hungary at the age of six and lasts to the age of sixteen. Before entering school, nearly 90 per cent of 3 to 6 year olds attend kindergarten. Since the mid-1940s, the backbone of compulsory education has been the eight-year general school, which is completed by 80 per cent by the age of 14, and by another 15 per cent at 15. The latest education act raised the duration of general school from eight to ten years.

After finishing general school, 95 per cent of the pupils go on to some medium level educational institution. About a quarter go on to general secondary schools, and a third to vocational secondary schools. These schools take four, sometimes five years and finish with a maturity examination entitling those passing to enter an institute of higher education. The others go on to some form of shorter vocational training, the majority in three-year schools providing a skilled worker qualification. Because of the relatively high

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dropout rate, the number of those leaving the school system possessing a qualification of some kind is a great deal lower than the number of those entering it. Of any generation, only a tenth enter the labour market with a higher education diploma and a fifth with secondary school education of full value. Nearly a third of school-leavers have no higher qualification than the eight years of general school completed, or even less than that.

Given its financial potential and the state of the economy, Hungarian society spends, by international standards, relatively highly on the operation and development of the school system. While the country's GDP has declined in the past couple of years, the share falling to education has actually grown: in 1989, 4.9 per cent of GDP was spent on education, in 1992 the figure was 7.1 per cent. This figure does not show the amount of money, also growing, which families spend on their children's education.

Until very recently, schooling was conducted on the basis of detailed, centrally determined curricula. New curricula were last introduced in 1978. In the second half of the 1980s, as a result of reforms then launched, schools were given a considerable amount of autonomy. Many schools initiated local innovations regarding their curricula. According to expert estimates, prior to the passing of the new education acts, at least a third of all schools deviated to some degree from the central curricula in force at the time.

The research done in Hungary under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (I.E.A.) throws some light on the efficiency of education in Hungary. According to a 1991 survey, in tests measuring reading skills, Hungarian students achieved 7th to 10th place among 14 years olds from 27 countries. They perform even better in the science subjects: according to a 1983 survey, Hungary was placed 3rd among 19 countries in biology and physics.

A great deal of discussion is going on today in every country on how to direct the educational system and on the relationship between central and local authorities. Hungary is reckoned to be decentralized.

Of primary and secondary level schools, 95 per cent are owned by local authorities enjoying a high degree of independence. These authorities decide on the establishing of schools or on changing their character, they appoint principals, determine their budgets, and approve their basic documents. Every school has statutes of its own, and the new education act rules that they must work out their own educational programme. The majority of schools have autonomous control over their budget. The employer of teachers is the principal, and the teaching staff has extensive rights in determining the system and operation of the school.

With rare exceptions, teachers working in the primary and secondary schools have higher education degrees: children up to 13 years old are taught by teachers graduating from a four-year training college and older ones by graduates of five-year universities. Today more than two thirds of kindergarten teachers have also graduated from an institution of higher education. Teachers' salaries, as in many other countries, fall well below the level of other professions with qualifications of a similar standard but, especially in country areas, can nevertheless be regarded as relatively high compared to average earnings. The teaching profession in Hungary is very active: there are many professional organizations which play an active part in shaping educational policies and in drafting educational programmes.

In the countries of the former Soviet bloc, the field of education was not unaffected by the dramatic political changes that followed the year of 1989. With the disappearance of central economic planning and the monolithic ideology, the emergence of a market economy and democratic political institutions, the educational system found itself in a radically new social environment.

In Hungary that transformation took place with fewer conflicts and less turbulence than in some other countries of the region. The reason was that efforts to dismantle some of the elements of rigid central economic planning had already begun here in the 1960s, and were, in the 80s, followed by some cautious political reforms. After 1985, for instance, the previous system of inspection, which also had in part a political role, was abolished, and schools were granted the right to approve or reject the appointment of principals by secret ballot (this right has recently been annulled by a decision of the Constitutional Court). In the 1980s, central decisions had a smaller and smaller part in the shaping of vocational training, and the increasingly independent firms had an ever greater say.

The great political realignment that took place in the year 1989-1990 entailed a modification of the fundamental legal framework of education. In 1990 the state monopoly of education was abolished by an amendment to the law; so too were the obligatory teaching of Marxist ideology and of the Russian language. Nearly all the new political parties that emerged agreed that the autonomy of schools and local communities should be further increased. Their educational policies emphasized that the Hungarian educational system ought to be brought closer to European norms, and that schools should give priority to the educational principles of democracy.

Numerous new, alternative initiatives took place: several private schools subscribing to a particular educational philosophy were established, a number of church institutions, abolished after the war, started up anew, and educational innovations were introduced by the staff in many state-run schools.

The new freely elected parliament of 1990 saw a majority of seats won by the national conservatives. One of the first steps taken by that parliament, one that had a direct bearing on public education, was the passing of a local government act. A high degree of political and economic autonomy was granted, even by international standards, to the nearly 3,000 elected authorities. It became their responsibility to provide primary and secondary education, and practically all the country's schools went into their ownership. This resulted in the establishment of more than 2,000 independent local educational authorities, covering every community, from small villages with a single school to large cities.

This is a very high number by international standards. The first free elections for the local authorities were held in the autumn of 1991, and saw a victory for the opposition liberal parties in the cities and for previous leaders standing as independent candidates in smaller villages.

In the first four years of democracy in Hungary, a decentralized system of education emerged, in which control at the local and national level was split between opposing political forces. Schooling evolved in a precarious balance between these political forces. This was what determined most measures concerning educational matters in those four years, and the new education laws came out of the same context. The actors involved in educational affairs had to learn the rules of the democra-

tic game of reconciling conflicting interests and seeking compromises, a learning process that was far from simple or free of conflicts, but which, on the whole, can be regarded as quite successful.

It hardly came as a surprise that the re-evaluation of the educational role of the churches gave rise to most clashes. In the years following the Second World War, the churches were all but entirely forced out of education; apart from the institutions for training minimum numbers of future clergy, they only had the right to maintain a few secondary schools, and within the state system they had no, or a very limited, opportunity to provide religious education. Following the political change, the denominations naturally demanded the restoration of their role in education and the revival of religious education on school premises. This purpose was met by the 1991 act on the restoration of church property, including church schools, to their former owners. Giving back functioning schools to the church and reintroducing religious education, however, met with resistance on the part of many who were not church members and was not unanimously welcomed by the pious either. This resulted in a number of local conflicts, some of which severely tested the young institutions of democracy.

The renewal of the substance of education was further complicated by the fact that the still centralized system of curriculum regulation had to be adjusted to an increased measure of local school autonomy. The blueprint for a national basic curriculum had been drawn up even before the political changes. Then, between 1990 and 1993, a series of drafts, sometimes following very different principles, became public. Although views are now somewhat closer to each other, a national consensus regarding the reform of the curriculum has still not been reached. One of the reasons is that different political groupings take a different view as to what is desirable in education. Another is that there are great differences between them where the desirable structure of the schools system is concerned.

A major breakthrough occurred in 1990 in that area as well. Hungarian students previously had to change schools for the first time at the age of 14 (which, for those entering vocational training also meant choosing an occupation), today they have the opportunity to move across to a secondary school offering general education at the age of 10 or of 12. The 1990 Education Act made it possible for secondary schools to start up lower forms a well. The result of this is that, beside the earlier four-year secondary schools for 14 to 18 year olds, there are now also six- and eight-year secondary schools taking students from the age of 10 or 12 to 18 years of age.

In addition, the school structure had to meet another major challenge. Because of the collapse of the majority of the so-called "giant socialist plants", a great number of the training schools for skilled workers linked to those plants also ceased to exist. Those institutions used to take a considerable share of the school-leavers in any year. Consequently, it became increasingly difficult for 14 year olds finishing primary school to continue at secondary level. The situation was made worse by the fact that large cohorts born in the mid-1970s reached secondary school age precisely at that time.

Educationalists, as well as Hungarian society in general, are divided in their judgement of the ongoing structural changes. Some welcome the appearance of new secondary schools taking on 10-12 year olds, seeing this as a sign of the improving quality of education, an attempt to meet more differentiated demands on the part of their pupils. Others are worried

that these changes may lead to social segregation, to a great deal of waste in the pool of national talent, and to a decline in the number of those taking a secondary education. As long as these questions remain unanswered, there can be little hope of major curriculum reform.

One of the major changes in the past couple of years that also had a crucial effect on education was the settlement of the legal position of public servants and those working in public institutions. Parliament passed an act on public servants in 1992, bringing in new regulations regarding the employment and incomes of teachers. Earlier, teachers' salaries had largely been determined through local bargaining; the new act means that a national salary scale has come into force, which lays down salaries on the basis of age and qualifications.

The new education acts

Two of the new education acts passed in the summer of 1993 have a direct bearing on schooling: the Public Education Act and the Vocational Training Act.

The Public Education Act reaffirms the constitutional rights established in the process of democratic change: it guarantees the freedom to found a school and the freedom to choose a school, and it guarantees the assertion of the freedom of conscience. In harmony with ethnic and national minority legislation passed earlier, it confirms the right of ethnic and national minorities to instruction in their native language and to the foundation of schools of their own. It ensures the right of teachers, parents and students to have a say in the decisions of schools and of those running the schools.

The act reaffirms the principle of shared responsibility. All three major factors in education, that is central government, local authorities and individual schools, have equally extensive responsibilities: they are all entitled to set goals and to devote resources to them. Any further development of public education is only conceivable if the three cooperate.

The responsibility of the central authorities concern mainly the running and development of the system as a whole; in the operation of individual institutions, the determining role is played by local communities, teaching staffs and the "users" of the schools. The Regional Educational Centres, subordinated to the government, are meant to support central control; however, they have no authority status. Local participation in decisions is taken at the school level and ensured by elected bodies established for every school, in which proportional representation is given to the operator of the school, the teaching staff and the parents. In some matters, these bodies even have the right to overrule school decisions.

The democratization of decision-making in public education has been aided also by the establishment of another two national consulting bodies. One is the National Board of Public Education, made up of representatives from higher education, the sciences and the teaching profession, concerned mainly with curriculum and textbook issues. The other, the National Board of Educational Policies, to be set up with the participation of school maintainers, central government agencies and those representing the interests of parents, students and teachers, will have a role in the reconciliation of interests regarding education policy. Mention should also be made of the National Board of Vocational Education, a tripartite consulting and decision-making body of employers, employees and government, operating for some years now: the activity of this body has now been codified.

One of the most important changes is that the duration of general education has been raised from eight to ten years. This obviously entails the transformation of the entire system of vocational training, especially in its shorter forms. While students could previously enter highly specialized three-year vocational training schools at the age of 14, in the future, short, specialized vocational training will only be available for over-16s, and its duration will be much shorter than before. This means that students will start vocational training after a broader general education, and that training will be able to adapt to the changing needs of the economy much faster.

The Education Act, on the other hand, left the problem of the schooling structure more or less open. It remains possible for students to enroll in eight-, six- or four-year general secondary schools at the ages of 10, 12 or 14. From the tenth form of the longer primary schools, however, there is no road leading to secondary school; from there students can only move into short vocational training courses. Thus the law permits the parallel development of a variety of vertical school structures; it is up to the local authorities to decide on them. This means that two different school structures in two neighbouring towns may develop, should local authorities so decide.

In defining the content of teaching, an important feature of the new act is that content regulation has been adapted to the existing conditions of local and school autonomy. As opposed to the earlier, single, highly detailed central curriculum, a "multi-tier" regulation will come into force. This will be built upon the following elements: (1) basic curriculum principles to be issued by the government (these, in fact, were published in March 1994); (2) a system of objectives setting out the skills and abilities to be achieved by a specific age; (3) national frame curricula related to the various school types and educational approaches; and, (4) local curricula developed by the schools and approved by their operators. Thus only the framework is determined centrally, the actual classroom work is done on the basis of local curricula worked out by the school. All this, however, will only come into force when the pertinent new regulations are completed and introduced. Until then, schools and parents will have to accept a kind of transition, a state where the old central curricula are no longer obligatory, while the new ones will only come into force later.

The new act has introduced major changes concerning how teaching is organized in the schools but these, too, will be introduced gradually. The annual number of teaching days has been set at 190, which is more than earlier. At the same time, the number of compulsory classes permitted in a single day has been restricted in forms 1 to 3 to no more than four per day, and even in secondary schools students must not have more than six a day.

The restrictions imposed on instruction time, more severe than before, are partly meant to protect students from being overburdened, and partly signal the changes taking place in the state's financial obligations. For the new law also envisages changes in the finances of education. If the law goes into force in an unchanged form, then from 1995 on, the central government will take responsibility only for moneys disbursed on salaries by the schools. Everything over and above that will have to be covered by the local authorities from their own funds. The state, however, will only provide for salaries which are needed to fulfill the obligations prescribed by law; for purposes other than those, even the money for salaries will have to be covered by the local authorities. Up to the completion of the final secondary school examination or the

first vocational qualification, parents and students will continue to receive the basic services free of charge; service beyond that, however, will have to be paid for in the future.

The new act has also redefined the conditions for private education. Thus private teaching establishments are eligible for government support only if they have signed contracts with local or national authorities, whereby they undertake public obligations. In this case, they are entitled to the same support as that received by schools run by the central or local authorities. In return for which they, too, have to provide basic services free of charge.

Problems and prospects

The new education acts are expected to result in several major changes in the Hungarian education system. These acts have made it possible for public education to adapt to the needs of a democracy and a market economy in a manner that is easy to follow for anyone, within a full legal framework. However, there are several areas in which the effect of the new acts is still difficult to judge. The reasons for this is partly that a number of the measures will come into force only later, and partly that some may be amended by future governments of a different political hue. In addition, public education has, or is likely to have, problems that can only be solved by further legislation or government measures.

One of the most basic issues still open is that of the curriculum. Mention has already been made of the government's acceptance in early 1994 of the principles of a new Basic National Curriculum. That document has a variety of functions. First, it outlines the fundamental social goals and values that must be followed in the creation of the frame curricula, local curricula or textbooks. Secondly, it sets down what the future document defining the age-related requirements must contain, and the examinations to be set in public education. Finally, it describes in detail the areas of knowledge that have to be taught at school. Here, it should be pointed out that no specific subjects are prescribed, only areas of knowledge as, for instance, "man and society", or "nature"; these, in principle, can be freely translated into concrete subjects by the schools.

The issuing of the Fundamental Principles of the Basic National Curriculum, however, leaves a number of questions open. At the moment, it is impossible to know, for instance, whether the same objectives will be formulated for all children between 10 and 14, or whether they will be formulated according to the type of school attended. Nor can it be known for certain in what depth or detail the frame curricula for the various school types will determine the content of education, in other words, how much freedom will actually be granted to the schools.

Effective teaching depends mainly on the textbooks and teaching materials used directly by teachers and students. There has been evolution in this market during the past couple of years too. New textbooks and teaching aids are being produced and marketed by a large number of publishers. That market, however, still carries much uncertainty even today. It is difficult to gauge demand, and, because of the changes in financing, both producers and distributors find it hard to make long term plans. Nor is the quality of the product always ensured. A properly functioning mechanism of professional critique, testing and further development for textbooks and teaching materials, so characteristic of highly developed market economies, is still lacking.

The most important force in the renewal of education is perhaps the teachers themselves. Most experts agree that there are

Top of the form

For the first time in Hungary, indeed in the whole of Eastern Central Europe, fifteen students sat for the International Baccalaureate, and did very well in it, by any standards.

The school concerned, the Karinthy Frigyes Gimnázium in a Budapest industrial suburb, teaches six subjects in English (with English as the language of instruction). On average, one out of twenty applicants is admitted to a preliminary year in which they are taught English, attending twenty lessons every week. Admittance to the preparatory course is based on an IQ test.

In the first year they are taught Physics, Mathematics, Biology, History, Geography in English by teachers who have a mastery of the language.

The results achieved by the school is also noteworthy. Around 95 per cent of the students are admitted to a university course, better than those from the Fazekas Gimnázium, which was previously considered unbeatable.

Students prepared for the International Baccalaureate, taken at the end of the 1993–1994 scholastic year, on the basis of a two-year curriculum. Of the seventy students who finished their second year, fifteen were selected to take this two-year course, which was supported by the World Bank.

Maximum points attainable at the International Baccalaureate are 45. The Hungarian students achieved an average of 39.5, more than half scored over 40. The lowest score was 34 and the average for all students was 39.3 (25 is the pass mark).

The Centre supplied the results of all students who took the examination, broken down by subjects. This can be compared with the results of Hungarian students.

Subject	Standard	World average	Hungarian average	Deviation
English	Upper	5.38	6.40	+1.02
History	Lower	4.20	5.60	+1.40
History	Upper	4.71	5.67	+0.96
Geography	Upper	4.53	5.89	+1.47
Applied chemistry	Basic	4.89	6.75	+1.86
Physics	Upper	4.44	5.75	+1.31
Physics	Basic	4.12	6.67	+2.45
Mathematics	Upper	4.36	5.67	+1.31
Mathematics	Basic	4.15	6.22	+2.07

As the table shows, these Hungarian students scored 1.52 points more than the world average in every subject, not counting Hungarian.

still many untapped resources in teacher training in Hungary. Three major problems are mentioned most frequently. One is the gulf between the university and non-university training of teachers. This prevents the high theoretical standard of university teaching and the practice-oriented quality of the non-university training from complementing and corroborating each other. Another problem, not independent of this, is that at the universities, teacher training is carried out by tiny departments of pedagogy, which are ill-suited to their function within the university structure. As opposed to most countries, and despite a few experiments, there are no faculties or schools of education of any considerable import in Hungarian universities. Finally, the excessive conservatism of teacher training in Hungary is also frequently mentioned, as is the absence of modern, child-centred educational methods and activating, motivating educational approaches which take individual differences into account.

The majority of teachers, of course, can only refresh their knowledge and renew their methodology while engaged in their daily teaching work. To be able to do that, they need a system offering a wide choice of in-service teacher training and educational support services. This is especially true when—as is the case in Hungary—schools have a large measure of independence in professional matters, and teachers are expected to play a key role in the renewal of education. Partly for financial reasons and partly because its importance is not properly recognized, in-service teacher training and pedagogical services in Hungary at the moment are not functioning satisfactorily. The County Pedagogical Institutes in all nineteen of the counties were an important element; their staffs, however, had to be heavily reduced in recent years because of the lack of central political and financial support.

With the issue of the curriculum remaining unsettled, developing the content of school education is necessarily limited. At least as much of an obstacle is, however, the unsettled question of the schooling structure. Since the law permits the existence of several vertical structures side by side, in other words, secondary schools may be dealing with primary schools covering 4, 6, 8 years, or indeed even 10 years, it is impossible to know the length of primary education cycles for which curricula should be planned or textbooks written.

Beyond the fact that hardly any major curriculum reform is conceivable as long as the issue of the school structure remains open, there are some other questions that cannot be answered today. One of the most important of these is whether it is right to exclude those youngsters who have taken the prolonged primary school up to their 16th year from secondary education. The 9th and 10th forms of primary school are not regarded legally as secondary school classes, nor do they enable those completing them to move on to secondary school. The new Examination of Basic Education to be completed at the age of sixteen, introduced by the new act in 1993, opens the door only towards short vocational training. This may have the undesirable result of creating a "dead-end" in the education system; it may subsequently hamper the further extension of secondary-level schooling, a condition, according to several analysts, for the development of Hungary's economy and its catching up with prevailing European norms.

Indeed, the problem, not spoken of most of the time, which underlies the majority of disputes concerning educational policy in Hungary, is that of the further extension of secondary school education. Demographic forecasts, barring a considerable growth in the ratio of students entering secondary school in the near future,

tell us that the numbers completing secondary school is likely to decline from today's 80,000 to 60,000. That would not only threaten the economy with a shortage of labour with a secondary education but also endanger the development of higher education. If one is to accept that the future development of the economy and society requires maintaining the present number of those completing their secondary education, then the need for a further extension must also be accepted.

The above described changes in the school structure, confirmed by the new acts, may greatly hinder the further extension of secondary school education. If lower forms taking on younger children are opened by the secondary schools, then these schools will have fewer places left for children of each cohort. On the other hand, if a growing proportion of children enter terminal primary school classes which do not lead towards secondary education, then the number of those eligible for admission to secondary school will fall. Finally, the experts warn that the quality of vocational training will also suffer if, at a very young age, the best students enter general secondary schools from which there is no option to move over into vocational training before they have completed their secondary studies.

The further progress of the educational system may be determined to a great extent by the evolving system of shared responsibility and financing. The fact that these issues receive much more attention today then earlier is a great help. As has already been mentioned, schools are run by more than 2,000 local authorities, which decide on questions as important as the opening or closing down of schools, defining their educational profile or the development of a vertical system of schools. That number is too high, and the problem of coordination between all those local units is unsettled. This is all the more important because the prolongation of general education and the changes in the connecting points between primary and secondary education mean that in many places the entire system of services must be thought over again. This requires a great deal of planning, and a weighing up of the conditions and possibilities, something that the smallest villages are hardly capable of doing on their own.

Coordination between local government and local educational planning can be carried out in a variety of ways. According to some, the local communities must be given complete freedom over whom they associate with, and in what way. Others believe that towns should take responsibility for the educational services in surrounding villages, or that their responsibility should be borne by the 19 counties of Hungary, which have no authority today. Still others advocate a smaller number of governing units, larger in size than the counties. Reviving the pre-war traditions of educational administration, the new acts have created eight Regional Educational Centres directly subordinated to the Ministry of Education. As opposed to the pre-war model, and contrary to certain intentions to recreate them, however, they were not given a role in planning and in inter-community cooperation. But they could not be given such a role, since that would mean that the planning and development of education would be separated from the planning and development of other public services; it would also mean that the entire process would be removed from the control of democratically elected political bodies.

Decision-makers will also have to think hard on how to handle the finances of education. The system brought into force by the new education acts implies a glaring contradiction which will have to be sorted out sooner or later. The contradiction

stems from the fact that while decisions concerning the employment of teachers (for instance, the number, qualifications and age of those employed) are still made locally, the direct financing of salaries has been taken on by the central government. In other words, if the system comes into force, the money will be provided by agencies who have no direct influence on the total allocated.

There are three ways to do away with that contradiction, although it is still unclear which of those will be chosen by the decision-makers. One is that, following the French model, decisions concerning the employment of teachers will also be moved up higher, to the level of the central government (that solution is advocated mainly by those who support the "Christian national" forces). Another is trying to influence the decisions of local employers by imposing tighter controls and regulations on them. The third, finally, is a return to the earlier system of full local and school responsibility regarding employment (a solution advocated mainly by the supporters of the liberal parties).

The private sector has an increasing importance in modern educational systems. This is also true of Hungary, which has not only seen a rapid rise in the number of private and church schools but also witnessed a veritable explosion in the role of the private sector in vocational training, retraining for the labour market, and in short-duration forms of training for special needs. There is, in society, a strong demand for private and church teaching, a demand which is visibly on the rise. It has been mentioned already that the latest legislation has set out the legal framework in which private education can function. It appears, however, that this framework does not always support the development of schools that are run neither by the state nor by local authorities. A major obstacle is that regardless of the size of the demand, these schools become eligible for government support only if the central government or the local authorities can be persuaded to sign contracts with them. There is, however, nothing to force the authorities to do this. On the other hand, private schools are eligible for government support only if they do as public schools, and this impinges on their character, the very reason that brought them into being.

Public education in Hungary today is undergoing momentous changes, and those changes are far from being concluded. The first hurdle—that of developing a legal framework conforming to the rules of democracy—seems to have been successfully cleared. At the same time, there are a great number of unsettled problems that will have to be answered by Hungarian society and by the makers of educational policy in the very near future. ❧

PERSONAL

Elemér Hankiss

Holding the Pass

My Days as a Media Chairman*

Please don't believe me. This will be a very personal and biassed account. About a bloodless war, which may offer some lessons to those who are interested in the trials and tribulations of a new democracy. And also in the fun one may have in building democracy.

An unceremonial entry

On a beautiful August morning in 1990, I woke to the strange and slightly nauseating feeling that I was chairman of Hungarian Television. A chairman *malgré moi.* After thirty years of quietly sitting at my desk or teaching at various universities, this was an absurd, and at the same time, a traditional East Central European situation. For want of somebody better, people are called to do something outside their own professional field. The wrong man in the right place? The right man in the wrong place?

In truth, however, on this beautiful morning I was not too much concerned with this aspect of East European social history. I was much more puzzled by a small but not unimportant detail. I had heard actors say that one of the most important skills in their métier was to know how to walk onto a stage. The problem to solve was to get from my desk at home to the desk in the office of the chairman of Hungarian Television. The physical distance was no more than two miles. But how to work out the logistics of a not too ridiculous and possibly unceremonial entry?

a) Am I supposed to ask them to send an official car for me? One of those black Russian cars which had been used by aparatchiks for forty ignominious years? Ruled out.

b) Shall I take my own car? My wife has already taken it.

c) Take a tram and the underground as I have done for decades in my normal life? Of course.

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East European Alternatives, *was published by Oxford University Press in 1990.*

* ■ This piece was written in the summer of 1993. In order to bring the chronology up to the present, a few footnotes have been added in September 1994. (For an account of the Media War, see *NHQ* 127, Autumn 1992. The Editor.)

d) How to dress? This was not a real problem since I did not have any of those suits that a real, serious manager would wear on such occasions. The uniform of East European intellectuals, jeans and a pullover, was the only available alternative. (In the first two years of their existence, East Central Europe's new democratic parliaments were full of these convulsively nonchalant jeans-and-shirt or jeans-and-pullover intellectuals; later they were finally convinced that they would not be reelected if they did not squeeze themselves into business suits and matching neckties. (The colour of the ties had begun to change in the last years of the ancien régime; first from flaming red to dark red and burgundy, and then to blue and grey; as a latest development, colourful post-modern arabesques have also appeared on younger parliamentarian ties.)

e) How to keep serious when I meet the first people in the building and have to play the role of chairman of this huge institution with more than three thousand employees? (In my research team there had never been more than ten of us.) I decided not to keep serious.

From the underground station, it was a short walk to the late 19th century building of Hungarian Television, which had been the Stock Exchange until the end of the Second World War, the grandiose and long flight of steps leading up to the main entrance, and here they are already, the choir that will follow, motionless, ceremoniously in black, all the hectic running about, into and out of the building, for the coming two years. I mean the security guards, benevolent old, retired policemen, pot-bellied and slab-sided, who will be forced out of their solemn passivity only in the last episode of the Media War, which will break out soon.

Now, on this first morning, they ask for my staff ID. I have none, I reply, but I happen to be the chairman of this institution. After a moment of embarrassment, they make way. I go up to the third floor.

The chairman's suite, red carpet, plants, sunshine. I knock at a big white door. A thin, elderly lady, with flashing eyes and icily cold manners. She had been the secretary of several of my aparatchik predecessors and is convinced that I shall sack her immediately. She escorts me to my office, a typical office of the 1980s, a mixture of bolshevik puritanism and tasteless pomposity, the bookshelves displaying the *Balshaya Encyclopediya* and Lenin's *Collected Works* (Stalin's *opera omnia* had already been removed).

I tell the secretary that I have nothing against her. She may stay if she wants to and if I am satisfied with her work. The first sign of feebleness? The first false step? Should I get rid of the old guard immediately? Or should I keep the best to run the business? (At that time, I did not consider these questions too seriously. Luckily. If I had, I should have got entangled in an endless and hapless controversy that has been resounding ever since all over East Central Europe. In a few weeks I decided to ignore everybody's past and to base my human resource policy on ability and achievement.)

The only consolation in this big, lurid office is a small terrace and the view onto one of the beautiful squares of late nineteenth century Budapest. Just across the square, the *fin de siècle* building of the National Bank, with the white facade of the American Embassy beside it. In the coming two years I shall show my more distinguished visitors the legendary walk on top of the US Embassy building where, according to popular belief, Cardinal Mindszenthy took his morning and evening constitutionals in the years he enjoyed the hospitality, and the sanctuary, of the US Embassy.

The trap

How did I get into this situation? After the collapse of the communist system in 1989, when the mills of democracy began to grind, we did not have too much choice. By we, I mean people who belonged, in some way or other, to the opposition to the communist regime.

The first free elections since 1947 were held in Hungary in March and April 1990. After the elections, the MDF, the main party in the coalition, with only a slight parliamentary majority, had to make a pact with the strongest opposition party and agree upon the main rules of the game. One of the first points of this pact was that they would pick two independent persons for the positions of chairmen of Hungarian Television and Hungarian Radio. This was not easy, since in the buoyant years of 1988–1989, and in the heat of the 1990 electoral campaign, few people could resist the temptation to jump headlong into party politics. After forty years of forced passivity, people had all the reasons to be impatient to do something for their country. Let alone the fact that rising to the position of a leading politician became, almost overnight, the most glamorous and attractive social role, which could bring not only power but fame, prestige, and a new identity after so many years spent in anonymity, if not in anomia.

It was in this situation that in June 1990, after the elections, the prime minister and the leader of the main opposition party came to me and my friend, Csaba Gombár (we are both political scientists and were teaching at Eötvös University in Budapest), and offered us these jobs. They told us that we were proposed as two independent persons, who were supposed to be able to keep a middle course and ensure the impartiality of the two institutions. At that time, in the post-revolutionary euphoria, all political parties seriously believed in the sanctity of the principle of the freedom of the press. They did not know yet how annoying the practice of this freedom would soon become for many of them.

For several weeks we said no, no and no. But finally we gave in and told them that we would accept the nominations under the condition that the bill just being submitted to parliament on regulating the appointment of the chairmen was modified. Under the communist regime, the Council of Ministers had the right to appoint the chairmen of Radio and Television (under the almost overt and im-

perative control of the Party Politburo). We made it clear that we would not accept appointment from the hands of the Prime Minister because we did not want to be dependent in any way on him or on the government. Our point was accepted and included in the bill. According to the new act, which became the foundation of the independence of the two institutions in the coming two years, the Prime Minister has only the right to nominate his candidates, who—after hearings in a parliamentary committee—are, or are not, appointed by the President of the Republic.

Even with this amendment, we accepted these positions only for six months or, more precisely, until a new Media Act was passed and our successors found. This was in July 1990. There is still no Media Act in Hungary. We have had a Media War instead.[1]

The Media War

After our appointment in August 1990, the honeymoon (if there was any) with the governing parties came to a quick and early end.

Csaba Gombár is a soft-spoken, gentle man, with a timid smile which can be mistaken for a sign of weakness. Which it is not. On the contrary. Actually, he unwittingly misled the government politicians with this smile—if they had looked for somebody who can be used, influenced, intimidated—because behind this boyish appearance there is a strong and courageous character. As for myself, I may be less modest and less soft-spoken, but I do happen to be rather sensitive to independence and allergic to people who want to tell me what to do.

The gentle or not gentle revolutions brought to East Central Europe the long expected freedom of the press but they have not liberated the electronic media from the control of those in power. There has been, of course, a substantial change in the character and intensity of control. But the fact remains that in most of these countries public television (which had been under the tight control of the communist party before the revolution) became government television or chairman's television after the first free elections, with changes in government being routinely followed by brusque changes in the leadership. There have been good and bad reasons for exercising control over the media. Among the good, or at least not entirely wrong reasons, is the argument that the extremely difficult process of transition to democracy and a market economy calls for common goals, national unity, a broad national support for government plans and policies. And since television and radio are indispensable for the success of these mobilizing strategies, the new governments felt it was inevitable and legitimate to suspend their pledge to the spirit of the freedom of the press and to extend their control over the public media. Those of a more nationalist

1 ■ This "war" will hopefully end in late 1994 when a new Media Bill will be submitted to Parliament.

kind may have added the slightly spurious argument that "public television is owned by the nation and, consequently, it has to be run by the government elected by the nation."

For two and a half years, Hungary was a happy and unhappy exception to this rule. In many ways. For two years and a half Hungarian Television and Hungarian Radio were the only independent public television and radio corporations in East Central Europe and, what is more, they were the most independent public media in Europe. They were almost absurdly independent. Due to the new act regulating the appointment of the chairmen and due also to the absence of a new Media Act, which would have created a balance between independence and social control, the two newly-elected chairmen had practically absolute control over their institutions. One might almost say that if they had decided to transform their institutions into, say, shoe factories, it would have been quite difficult to legally stop them from doing so.

Actually, they set out in a less (or more?) absurd direction. They made an attempt to transform their formerly party controlled institutions into European type public television and radio corporations, with a high level of public responsibility, impartial news and current affairs programmes, and a wide range of educational, cultural and entertaining programmes. They did and did not succeed. They did, because by 1992 their programming could stand its ground against the best European public television, in spite of a much weaker financial background. On the other hand, they failed, because after more than two years of successful resistance, they were finally defeated by party politics.

This was not a big surprise, since almost all the power had been on the side of the governing parties and the government, with all their legislative and executive means. Though we, too, had some protection and some important partners. We could, first of all, rely on the letter and spirit of the law. Second, in the course of the Media War, we were given more and more support by the greater and, in my opinion, better part of the printed media and by the opposition parties. And, last but not least, we had the power of being independent. Our adversaries knew, as well as our friends, that we personally were not interested at all in keeping our positions, we did not want to accumulate power for ourselves, and that we would be happy to go back to our own profession as soon as possible. We could not be blackmailed or intimidated into bad compromises or conformism.

The facts

July 1990. The two candidates for chairman were proposed by the Prime Minister and, after being heard and unanimously approved by the Cultural Committee of Parliament, they were appointed by the President of the Republic.

December 1990. Conflicts with the governing parties and the government began. Government politicians did not see any "guarantees" in the individuals I had appointed to leading positions in Hungarian Television. They cut our subsidy by half.

From January 1991 on. We began a radical reorganization of Hungarian TV, with the aim of transforming it from a rigid bureaucratic state institution into a modern and flexible television corporation, one which is like a commercial television company in its organization and management but retains its public values and duties intact. Right-wing groups and the governing parties began to attack us on various counts. For instance:

a) We are "commercializing" national television. The facts: We developed our commercial activities in haste, founded a joint company with one of the world's greatest media agencies and doubled our income from advertising within one year (and so we were able to survive in spite of the budget cuts, and to the dismay of our governmental adversaries).

b) We are "Americanizing" national television. The facts: We began to screen *Dallas* and other American series. But the proportion of domestically and European made productions has remained much higher in our programming than in most European public television corporations.

c) We pay our stars more than the salary received by the Prime Minister. The facts: Our stars did earn more than the Prime Minister, just as their counterparts earn more in all western countries. But after having lived for a thousand years in highly hierarchical societies, it was difficult to understand and swallow the fact that the king earns less than the jester.

d) Our journalists and programmes are biassed against, and too critical of, the government. The facts: In the first month after the elections in 1990, this was at least partly true. In the first half of 1991, however, our overall programming was already well balanced, with some pro-government and pro-opposition programmes still remaining.

e) By reorganizing the institution, we have ruined the old workshops and as a result, jeopardized the dominance of Hungarian national cultural values in the programming. The facts: We dismantled the large departments and replaced them with a number of small producers' units, which were to compete for commissions from two channels. The outcry came from those who lost, sailing under nationalist and pro-government flags.

From April 1991 on. Prime Minister Antall, supposedly under pressure from the right wing of his party, began to propose various persons as vice-chairmen for Hungarian Television and Hungarian Radio (with the less and less veiled intention of having somebody there through whom the government could exert its influence). For almost a year, he was not able to have his way.

From May 1991 on. Government experts excavated an old (1974) decree of the then communist Council of Ministers, which gave the Council the right to "supervise" Hungarian Television. The Prime Minister used this—to say the least, anachronistic—decree as one of his main instruments (or weapons) in the ensuing Media War.

November 1991. I started a new evening news programme on Channel 2 to counterbalance the more and more right wing tendencies of the evening news programme of Channel 1. In the budget debate in December, we were punished by having practically all our subsidy cut.

1 March 1992. The Prime Minister finally succeeded in forcing vice-chairmen on the two institutions.

3 March 1992. The new vice-chairman made the mistake of seriously overstepping his authority on his very first day in office and so inadvertently he gave me the opportunity, and the excuse, to suspend him from his position. This led to a long and passionate legal controversy between the Prime Minister and myself. (I shall come back to this controversy in a moment.)

May and June 1992. Not being able to win the legal argument, and presumably under greater and greater pressure from his party's right wing, the Prime Minister proposed to the President of the Republic to dismiss me and the chairman of Hungarian Radio from our positions. After parliamentary committee hearings, the President turned down the proposal.

August 1992. István Csurka, vice-president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), published a soon to be notorious pamphlet, in which he drew the outlines of a populist and nationalist ideology and programme, with xenophobic and anti-modernist overtones. This made the nationalist versus European, conservative versus liberal, controversy even more passionate and absurd. In Mr Csurka's mythology there was a Judeo-bolshevik-liberal-cosmopolitan conspiracy against the Hungarian nation. Csaba Gombár and myself were unmasked by him and some of his followers as chief agents of this conspiracy.

September 1992. The craze went even further when hunger strikes were staged by nationalists against me and my colleague at the Radio. And when right-wing groups organized demonstrations against the President of the Republic, Csaba Gombár and me in the streets of Budapest. A crowd of about 15,000 requested my resignation in my favourite square in front of the Television building. A week after, a counter-demonstration of about 60,000 people protested against these attacks and in support of human rights and basic democratic values.

September and October 1992. I dismissed the editor in chief of the main news programme (a former Communist Party secretary turned the mouthpiece of nationalist and populist forces) and the editor in chief of our main foreign news magazine (a former member of the Communist Party praesidium in Hungarian Television, who, after 1989, became the untouchable hero of the nationalist forces in Hungary; apart from that, he is a gifted journalist). Csaba Gombár had taken similar steps in the Radio a few weeks earlier.

November and December 1992. In retaliation, the Prime Minister started disciplinary proceedings against me and then suspended me. I protested immediately, and questioned his right to initiate such a procedure and to suspend me since, in my reading, he was and could not be my employer. (Such a dependency would be against the law and would jeopardize the freedom of the press.) I brought a suit against the Office of the Prime Minister for what I saw as an illegal act. The first trial was held and adjourned in February 1993. It will be an important test of the independence of the Hungarian judiciary whether the judges will be able to rule against the government, if we can prove our case, which we shall.[2]

December 1992. In the debate on the 1993 budget, the parliamentary majority voted for a paragraph according to which the budgets of Hungarian Television and Hungarian Radio were incorporated into the budget of the Prime Minister's Office as from January 1, 1993.

27 December 1992. The Media Bill collapsed in Parliament.

6 January 1993. With reference to these two events (budget and Bill), we (Csaba Gombár and myself) submitted a letter to the President of the Republic asking him to relieve both of us of our offices. To this day, he has not accepted our request.[3]

6 March 1993. According to the Prime Minister, through our "resignation" we ceased to be chairmen of the two institutions. According to the President of the Republic, we did not resign, or if we did, he has not yet accepted our resignation. So we have to continue to consider ourselves chairmen of these two institutions. Whom to believe?

East European absurdities

Eastern Europe has a long and brilliant history in absurdities even without Kafka, Broch, Capek, and Mrozek. *K. und K.* absurdities were followed in the 1920s and 30s by Hungarian, Czecho-Slovak, and Polish national absurdities,

2 ■ The judge in charge of the case has kept adjourning the trial ever since.

and later by the murderous absurdities of bolshevism. The Media War in Hungary has made its modest contribution to the arsenal of post-velvet-revolution absurdities.

At that time I thought that I had the unique privilege of being the first Television chairman against whom a parliamentary deputy had staged a hunger-strike. I was mistaken. A few weeks later I was told by English colleagues that a couple of years ago a Welsh member of the Westminster Parliament had started a hunger strike demanding Welsh-language broadcasting by the BBC. He got it. His Hungarian counterpart was less successful. He did not get anything outside warm hugs from Mr. Csurka and company.

The demonstrations I have mentioned above also had an aura of absurdity. To conclude this brief survey of media-absurdities, let me come back to my present schizophrenia. As I write these lines, I am flying over the Atlantic and I have no idea who or what I am. I hope not, but I may still be chairman of Hungarian Television. But perhaps I am not any more. It may be said perhaps that de jure I am and de facto I am not. Or would it be more precise to say that, according to one interpretation of Hungarian law I still am, and according to another interpretation, I am no longer? To explain this ambivalence or plurivalence, I have to refer to the last act of the Media War or Media Comedy.

On the 6th of January 1993, we, Csaba Gombár and me, wrote a letter to the President of the Republic asking him to relieve us of our duties as chairmen of these two institutions. We gave the following reasons. First, after the failure of the Media Bill in Parliament last December, and since there is no hope of the passage of a new Bill until after the general elections of 1994, we feel ourselves released from our promise to stay until a Media Act has been passed. Second, by losing their financial independence under the new Budget Act, our institutions have lost their hard-won autonomy and have become again East European, government-controlled state media. Their organizational re-transformation back into what they had been before 1989, in the bad old days, is well under way. Third, we do not want to assist in the destruction of two of the most important autonomous institutions in our new democracy.

The Prime Minister eagerly jumped at the opportunity. In a letter of the 20th of January, he wrote that he accepted our "resignation" and entrusted the running of the two institutions to the two vice chairmen. Next day, on the 21st of January, the President of the Republic issued a statement according to which a) we did not resign, b) it is his exclusive right to accept or not to accept our request to be dismissed, c) if the Prime Minister proposes our dismissal, and that is his sole right, d) he will consider the proposal and make his decision in due time.It is not tragic,

3 ■ He did not accept our request until almost two years later, in July 1994, when the new government had promised that it would submit to Parliament a new Media Bill guaranteeing the independence of the two public media.

and it is not exceptional, that in a country like or unlike Hungary the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic do not agree on some important matter and even quarrel publicly. From France to the former Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, there are numerous examples of such conflicts. These conflicts are, of course, more dangerous in emerging, fledgling, fragile new democracies.

Tragic it was not, but absurd it was, the situation in which we were forced to decide whether the President of the Republic or the Prime Minister was right. And it would have been nonsensical and cruel if each of our several thousand colleagues, managers, producers, cameramen, editors, security guards, cleaning women, and others had been forced to decide day by day whom to obey—us, or the new men delegated by the government.

We did not want to involve innocent staff in this ordeal and we did not want to get entangled in vicious squabbling degrading to all the parties concerned. Having pondered all the pros and cons, we published an open letter on the 20th of January 1993, in which we explained our dilemma. We stated that we considered ourselves the lawful chairmen of these institutions but would not exercise our rights until the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, or Parliament, or the Constitutional Court, or a Court (I have mentioned that I brought a suit against the government) has cleared up this mess. This was our latest, and I hope last, action in the Media War.

The rules of the game

When the Prime Minister saw that he could not prove and win his case legally, he looked for direct political ways and means to bring me and my colleague to our knees. In May 1992 he asked the Cultural Committee of Parliament to investigate our "ability" to run these two institutions. With a government majority in this Committee, he did not take too much risk.

Csaba Gombár and I chose different strategies. He went to the hearing and read a short statement saying that he did not accept the authority of the Committee because it was not a neutral body—and walked out. Scandal. Next week I walked in with five experts and thousands of documents and announced that I was happy to be there and to be able to discuss important matters with them, distinguished politicians. Hilarity. "But," I added, "I shall force you to take these hearings seriously, since parliamentary hearings in a decent democracy should be taken seriously. I shall make your lives miserable in the coming days. I shall do my best to make it very difficult for you to pass judgement without considering the facts, figures and evidence which I shall submit to you." And the hearings lasted for thirty hours and three long days.

During the hearings, deputies from the governing parties first argued that I had not observed some rules and laws while transforming and managing Hungarian Television. When we proved that they were wrong, they tried to con-

vince the public, and themselves, that Hungarian Television did not do enough to serve the interests of the Hungarian nation, that it had become too international, Americanized, commercialized, "anti-magyar". When we proved through figures, statistics, analysis that the contrary was true, they finally lost their tempers, swept all the documents, figures, pieces of evidence off the table and retreated to the ultima ratio of party politicians: "We, the governing parties, have lost confidence in you and this is sufficient reason to propose your dismissal, even without any further facts, evidence, or, arguments."

It was an interesting exercise in learning democracy. It was almost moving to see how governing party MPs, or at least some of them, struggled with their conscience. To see how they tried to squeeze their party interests (and their antipathies for this meddlesome chairman) into the strait-jacket of legal rules. By that time, almost the whole country was watching the events of the Media War, which were reported on a daily basis by the written press, the Radio and the Television. And those who watched may have understood, for the first time in their lives, that democracy was not an abstract construct or a couple of sublime ideas but, simply and very practically, a well-defined set of rules of the game. They could realize that a democratic policy needs well-defined rules agreed upon by all the interested parties and the willingness of its citizens to observe these rules, even if their momentary interests would be better served by breaking these rules. Hundreds of people have admitted, and hundreds of thousands would certainly agree, that these hearings were an elevating and traumatic experience for them. It was a fascinating and disturbing sight to see how politicians first made enormous efforts to attain their goals within the framework of the democratic rules of the game—and how tragic it was to see their final failure and self-humiliation.

Half a year later, in January 1993, the same ceremony was repeated but, by this time, without the personal drama of some of the participants. By that time, after having been more than two years in office, government politicians seemed to have lost their former timidity and innocence. They seemed to have realized more and more that they had the power to have their own way. With the national congress of the MDF approaching,they had increasingly lost their tempers, and some among them went out of their way to prove their unrelenting patriotism to the forces of the right. In the disciplinary procedure he started against me, the Prime Minister appointed the Minister of Justice as commissioner and three other ministers as members of the disciplinary committee. After making, with lordly nonchalance, one legal and formal mistake after the other, they played the cynical comedy of a formal trial to an end.

This was a real scandal that resounded through the country. The minutes of the trial were published (in a form and under circumstances reminiscent of the good old days of samizdats) and they became a bestseller overnight; in one of the Budapest theatres, actors read passages from it with the audience roaring with laughter and indignation; the Media War had turned into a kind of tragi-comedy.

Some journalists went so far as to label the procedure the first show trial since the free elections in Hungary in 1990. This was, of course, a metaphor which stretched similarities far too far. It is true that the whole process was motivated by the political will to get rid of two broadcast media chairmen. It is true that the whole case was prefabricated and judgement had been passed before the trial. It is true that the disciplinary committee passed judgement without considering the hundreds of facts and pieces of evidence that proved the innocence of the defendant, etc. But everything else was different. All this took place in a democracy, in 1993, and not in a dictatorship in 1953. The stakes were much lower. Instead of the hangman, cheering crowds and sympathizing journalists greeted the condemned who appealed the verdict and stated that he would go to Strasbourg, to the Court of Human Rights, if he does not find a truly independent court of appeal in Hungary. I do hope that he will.

Lessons learnt

The Media War has done much harm to the country. It has become a stupefying case of public hysteria and paranoia, a public ritual of hatred and prejudice, a tragi-comic and mythical war between nationalist and anti-nationalist passion and rhetoric. An issue that has absorbed far too much political and social energy, that has delayed the legislative work of parliament, that has generated hatred between the political parties and has reduced their ability and willingness to soberly negotiate and compromise.

But it has yielded at least as much profit too, if not much more. I have just referred to the lesson taught by the parliamentary hearing in June about the importance of the rules of the game in a democracy. And we, liberals and conservatives, politicians and media people, people in government and people in the streets have learnt a lot also from other episodes of this conflict. Let me give some examples.

Don't fear conflicts

After having lived for several decades in the artificial peace and lukewarm compromise of Kádárism, from which conflicts were paranoically and hermetically excluded, the Media War was among those events which taught us that conflicts—if they are kept within boundaries—play an indispensable and useful role in democratic societies. Don't fear them and don't seek them. But use them as an important political instrument. You may even generate conflicts if, in the given situation, they may give momentum to public and political life, if they may bring to the surface latent and lingering antagonism, if you think they may help locate and reveal problems which may have been ignored or swept under the carpet, if they help crystallize, handle and mediate social interests. The record of the Media War in this respect is mixed. It helped both reveal and disguise underlying, real social conflicts.

Tell them they are mistaken

After centuries of various forms and degrees of serfdom, the Media War helped people realize that in a democracy even he who holds the highest post is not an all-powerful monarch: he has some rights and does not have other rights. This must have been a pleasant and liberating surprise. People were able to witness, with a shiver, the fact that a simple citizen can stand up and say in public: "Mr Prime Minister, I have to tell you, with all due respect, that you are mistaken." And nothing happens. No siren-wailing police cars coming, no courts martial convening, no jail doors slamming. Nothing.

The power of law

People could experience also, most of them for the first time in their lives, how powerful law may be in a democratic society. They could see that two fragile public institutions, which could rely only on the letter and spirit of the law, had been able to protect their newly won autonomy against extremely strong pressures and attacks coming from the side of the government and the governing parties for two years. It must have been a bewildering and fascinating experience for them that even the powerful, who could have obtained their goals by force, did observe the law even though it curbed their intentions and interests.

Responsibility

After 1989 it came as an uneasy surprise how difficult it is to be a democrat—in a democracy. This was a real surprise since it had been comparatively easy to be a would-be democrat in a dictatorship. After 1989 we have had to learn that democracy cannot be imported, it cannot be bought off the peg. And that it is not brought about and established overnight by a first and single free election. It may be generated only in the course of a long and tedious learning process, in which everybody has to take part and has to take up his or her responsibilities.

The fact that we have a government responsible to parliament does not mean that everybody else is relieved of all responsibilities. That we can go on living in the Heaven and Hell of childish irresponsibility which we enjoyed, and suffered from, in the four decades of communism. When it was easy and legitimate to blame the communists for everything miserable in our lives. The Media War may have shown to many that there is no democracy without citizens acting with responsibility and, if necessary, civil courage.

People may have understood also why the existence of autonomous institutions is a *sine qua non* of modern democracies. At one point, the Media War triggered off a heated controversy over the best political model for the country. The Prime Minister, a historian of 19th century British parliamentarism, believed in the superiority of the Westminster-type democracy in which the party, or party coalition with a majority in Parliament, has practically absolute power while it is the government in office.

In another model, that of 20th century pluralistic democracy, the interests of a complex contemporary society can best be intermediated and integrated by the interaction of a wide range of autonomous institutions, among which the government is only one of the most important ones. But other independent institutions—Parliament, local governments, the judiciary, the Constitutional Court (if there is one), the Central Bank, the National Accounting Office, the media, the various institutions and bodies of interest intermediation—also play an indispensable (and not subordinated) role.

This decentralized and interactive model may be especially important for a country like Hungary, the social and political development of which had been retarded and distorted by centuries of highly centralized authoritarian regimes, even if between 1867 and 1948 this was a democracy of the authoritarian kind.

In 1992, Hungarian Television and Radio became, in their stubborn fight for autonomy, major actors in a society protesting against the centralizing efforts of the government. This dimension of the conflict elevated the Media War, for a couple of months, to the rank of a major political confrontation. The country was watching, with fascination, impatience, or anger, but certainly not without learning an important lesson, the ups and downs of this conflict. The lesson that there is no ready-made model of democracy, that each country has to work and fight out the best model for itself.

The pageantries of democracy

We could learn also, with no less surprise, that even scandals and political circuses may play a positive role in the public life of democracies. If they are not too frequent, or too great, and if they provide good theatre, they may add the necessary publicity and limelight to the struggle of political actors. And they may generate a sort of catharsis and contribute to the necessary cleansing of public life.

The Media War did produce its own scandals, public ceremonies, and *coups de theâtre.* It forced us to enter the stage, to play our part, to deliver scene-shaking monologues, profit from the dramaturgical mistakes of our adversaries. Let me admit, feeling ashamed, that I, myself, played various roles in our Made

in Hungary Media Tragi-Comedy. I played the role, for instance, if not of the Flying Dutchman, but at least that of the Flying Chairman. And played also the role of an uncompromising man (which I am not in real life) who is ready to go to the barricades for his ideals if it is inevitably necessary (am I...?).

In the first months of 1992, I went on a kind of sabbatical and taught at Stanford University as a visiting professor. (I had signed a contract with the university long before I became chairman of Hungarian Television and—after a delay of more than a year—I finally had to meet my obligation.) On a beautiful morning in early March I got a phone call from Budapest. My colleagues reported that the new vice-chairman (who had been appointed as a "politically independent" person) turned out to be the man of the government (or even more that of the populist right wing group within the governing party). In the very first hours of his being in office, he started reorganizing the institution. Thus he gave me the opportunity to intervene. I immediately sent a fax to the new vice-chairman, with copies to the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic, in which I suspended him and took the first plane back to Budapest. (I spent the next four months commuting between the Television building in Budapest and the Stanford campus, flying back and forth every fortnight, teaching here and managing there, so that at the end I knew all the individual polar bear families in Greenland. The spectacle of this flying to and fro, to the mysteriously faraway land of happy California one week, and back to the gloomy battles of the Media War in Hungary next week, gave a kind of mythological, or theatrical, dimension and glamour, and strong publicity to our fight. And we needed this latter badly.)

When I came back to Hungary first, the Prime Minister was polite, icy, and furious. He urged me to suspend the suspension because, according to his interpretation, I did not have the right to suspend his appointee. After having consulted with my lawyers, I answered that according to our interpretation of existing laws and regulations, I did have the right to suspend him. A bitter legal battle ensued, which finally went to the Constitutional Court. The court issued a judgement of such virtuoso complexity and ambiguity that both sides could interpret it as supporting their case. The Prime Minister asked the President of the Republic for my dismissal on the basis of this statement. And the President of the Republic refused to sanction it on the basis of the same judgement.

The scene for another show was set by the Prime Minister himself. When he suspended me on the 6th of December he, or his aides, added that I should not enter the building until the disciplinary committee has passed its judgment. This was heaping mistake on mistakes. First, the suspension was unlawful or at least legally controversial. To take it for granted and act accordingly, before a court has ruled on the case, was unlawful or at least a case of prejudgment. Second, there was no sound legal basis for forbidding me to enter the building. It was an imprudent and futile act of vengeance on the side of the hunters who felt that, after two years of failures, now they are close to their quarry. They made my part

very easy. Since I considered the disciplinary procedure, and the suspension, unlawful or at least not proved to be lawful, I stated that I should ignore them until the ruling of the court. And announced that I should go to my office next morning, as usual.

This was my second, but now, a ceremonial entry. I again took the tram and the underground since I did not want that, arriving by car, the "choir", the flock of security guards in black, spot me too early. I saw already from afar that—as in the third act of a Lehár operetta, the flight of steps leading to the main entrance was swarming with people. I ran up the stairs and bumped against the line of the guards, who—after a moment of hesitation and embarrassment, which remind me of my first hasty entry more than two years before—gave way and let me in, into the crowd of journalists, dozens of television cameras, and hundreds of my colleagues, filling the great hall of the building and its galleries, laughing and weeping, cheering and acclaiming, not me, but themselves, and all of us, this fleeting moment of moral victory, the last sweet moment of our autonomy for which we had fought together for two years. Even if I try to be very down to earth and almost cynical, I have to admit that this was a great moment in my, in our, lives. And good theatre, too.[4] ❧

4 ■ Between January 1993 and July 1994 the government, and a right-wing faction within the governing party, practically controlled Hungarian Radio and Television. After the parliamentary elections in April and May 1994, the new government promised to respect the independence of the two public media. Its experts have drafted a new Media Bill which is now being discussed in various committees. The text of the bill is still highly controversial and reflects the conflicting values and interests of the two ruling parties, the Socialists and the Free Democrats.

CLOSE-UP

György Szücs

Not to Praise, But to Bury

The Budapest Sculpture Park

In times of major historical change incredible energies are spent by the new powers that be, and by ordinary people, on changing the external space in which they live. Environmental elements (coats-of-arms, inscriptions, statues, etc.) so familiar that they seem to be part of the overall scenery of streets and squares, suddenly "come alive"; some of the more enterprising may feel it is time to engage in a guerrilla war against them. Any investigation of people's relationship to environmental elements of symbolic value may lead to some highly interesting conclusions on cultural history and mass psychology. As Ortega y Gasset notes, "It would be more than interesting to track down each and every outbreak of iconoclasm that has occurred in art and religion."

The events accompanying the Great War compelled a Hungarian cultural historian, Gyula Végh, to give an overview of the history of iconoclasm. He reports on the sacking of the German Embassy in St. Petersburg: "A few dozen workers are making efforts to pry off the huge bronze statues decorating the facade of the building. They succeed. One figure, a work by Eberhardt Encke, falls with a loud bang onto Isaac Square, breaking into a thousand pieces. All this takes place in the presence of troops and policemen, to great applause from the distinguished audience." The previous, stable order of the country is shaken, one of its components (in this case, Russian–German friendship) suddenly turns into its very opposite, and the very forces meant to keep order no longer feel it their duty to prevent the disturbance, since the institution to be protected has just lost its worth and validity. It is precisely the discarding of the "unneeded" ballast that the new behaviour is targeted at and destruction is temporarily incorporated into the new order of things. *Panem et circenses* soon becomes the device and of the two, the latter is much easier to supply.

This sequence of events is stereotypical: it creates and erases objectified symbols, the bulk of which have always to do with the legitimization of political authority or with its disintegration. No matter how far one goes back in time, the beginnings are impossible to find. The gesture of destruction itself has a magic impact, be it the erasing of a prehistoric drawing, the scraping off of the *cartouches* of Egyptian pharaohs or ostracism in Ancient Greece.

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is on the staff of the Hungarian National Gallery. One of his fields of research is official art in 20th century Hungary.

The examples are endless, but right up to our times we can see that the person (or thing) and its image are frequently confused with one another, and the destruction of the *icon* is, in reality, meant for the person or the idea the person represents.

In Hungary today the restoration of the country's old, crowned coat-of-arms and the use and display of offensive political symbols (the swastika and, in line with the anti-communist reflexes of the Antall government, the red star, etc.) are governed by laws enacted by Parliament. Various memorial sites have been filled with traditional wooden grave markers evoking the spirit of the ancient Hungarian past. Initially erected without any nationalistic overtones they were meant to mark the real and imaginary graves of the martyrs of 1956. On Lot 301, the resting place of the executed leaders of the 1956 revolution, a monument by György Jovánovics was erected after a competition; it follows the classical principles of sculptural forms and avoids the pathos characteristic of so many monuments. Not long afterwards, a "Székely gate" was erected there by certain groups advocating the primacy of what they called "national values", in order to counterbalance the monument which, in their view, lacked specific content. Monuments that had survived the communist regime, under which they were branded as reactionary and had been removed, were returned to their original sites (e.g. Halbig's *Immaculata Column* in front of the St Roch Chapel). A restoration process is going on in the visual environment bringing back such statues as that of Elisabeth, wife of Franz Joseph, beloved by the Hungarians.

Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

Ilona Király

Lifting the Hungarian Soviet Republic Memorial (Barna Buza).

As a result of the "patching up" of the holes in national history, the almost simultaneous inauguration of tablets commemorating figures of widely different, sometimes opposing, views has become daily practice. (For example, in 1991, a memorial to Charles IV (the Emperor Charles I) the last, exiled King of Hungary, was unveiled by his son.)

The year 1989 saw the symbolic send-off to the previous four decades: in June Imre Nagy was reburied, and János Kádár, the man after whom the era was named,

Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

Tamás Anheuer

Hoisting Béla Kun. (Imre Varga).

died in July. The withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary was completed by 1990. The fate of the memorials created in the spirit of Social Realism and meant for eternity, awaited decision. Several ideas were mooted publicly. It was proposed that an open-air museum be established for statues of Lenin, which might even serve as a tourist attraction for the coming World Expo. The Recsk League, an association of former inmates of the most notorious forced labour camp of the 1950s, came up with the idea of an unusual memento: the statues of Lenin and Liberation memorials should be re-erected on the site of the former camp.

There was a mood of everything for sale in the air, with a cheerful "Regime Ending Party" in Budapest in February 1990 and the SocReal Ball in Szeged (7 November 1990). Those eager to do more pulled down a number of statues which would have been removed within a couple of days anyway. Those involved may have felt, beyond their justifiable anger, that their action might produce lasting political capital for them.

Well-choreographed as these political "happenings" were, the more composed observer's first impression was a sense of *déja vu*. Marx's oft-cited thesis comes to mind, if somewhat inappropriately: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs down on the minds of the living with the weight of a nightmare. And precisely when they appear to be engaged in transforming their own selves and the things around them in order to create something that never existed before, it is precisely in such revolutionary periods that they painstakingly evoke the spirits of the past for their own service, borrow their names, battle slogans, costumes, so that the new world historical scene might be staged in this respectable guise and in this borrowed language."

In the last half a century there have been two instances of iconoclasm here that may be accepted as legitimate calls for the overthrow of totalitarian regimes. The first was the blowing up in 1944 of the statue of Gyula Gömbös, a pro-Nazi, ultra-rightist politician and Prime Minister of

Hungary from 1932 to 1936 (János Pásztor, 1942); the other was the great symbolic act in Budapest of 23 October 1956, the pulling down of the statue of Stalin (Sándor Mikus, 1951). The memory of the 1944 deed is marked by a memorial stone up to this day, a cultural absurdity in itself, calling attention, as it does, to the deliberate absence of a monument. In 1989 the eight-metre statue of Stalin was partly reconstructed as a prop by the film-maker Márta Mészáros for a scene depicting its being pulled down in the last part of her *Diary* trilogy. The unexpected sight of the resurrection caused a certain amount of shock and confusion, but at least people were able to re-live the moment of the Great Fall.

In December 1990, those taking part in a "Monuments in Hungary" conference appealed to the country's conscience not to destroy the monuments of the communist decades, an unjustifiable act if they are regarded as historical documents. "We find it important, regardless of their artistic value, that they should be preserved in a place and manner accessible to the public, as documents of an era. We propose that the removal or keeping of the public sculptures of the past era be decided by the local councils concerned, with the participation of committees of independent experts."

In the same sober spirit, paragraph 109 of Act XX 1991 ruled that decisions concerning the placing, transfer, removal and demolition of works of art in public areas fall within the competence of the elected councils of the given local government authority; in the case of Budapest, the responsibility is the city council's. At the end of 1991 the capital's General Assembly discussed the memorials and tablets one by one, voting in each specific case on their fate. (The issue was pressing: István Kiss' Liberation Memorial on Thököly út had been pulled down by persons unknown a month earlier.) Of the works finally sent to the sculpture park, there was some disagreement concerning the statues of the two Soviet officers shot down during the siege of Budapest while trying to convey a truce offer. The huge figures of Captains Steinmetz (Sándor Mikus, 1949) and Ostiapenko (Jenő Kerényi, 1951) had stood at the entrances to the capital, and were regarded by many as landmarks to which people were accustomed. The view that the two statues meant memories of the beginning of oppression prevailed.

Tamás Anheuer Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

Captain Ostiapenko (Jenő Kerényi).

Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

Tamás Anheuer

Marx and Engels (György Segesdi) prepared for removal. [The poster reads: Farewell, Marx and Engels?].

The Assembly became the forum for an interesting historical debate which showed that some action or feature of the person portrayed in a work of art mattered more than its artistic merit.

A competition for a design for the empty site offered by Budapest's 22nd District started in 1992. Plans were submitted by the three competitors invited to take part. All three attempted to design an environment for the sculptures collected in an emblematic manner.

In Lajos Jeney's design, the statues are placed inside a circular structure. The wall would come to a point at a place where it would be crowned by Kisfaludi Strobl's Liberation Memorial, currently on top of St Gellért Hill in Buda. Jeney intended to evoke the physical (Berlin Wall) and spiritual (monuments of victory, space travel, etc.) atmosphere of the age.

György Tokár created an earthwork in the shape of a five-pointed star in the centre of which, surrounded by a star of flowers, there would be the statues of Marx and Engels. The whole complex would have a barbed-wire fence around it.

The design eventually accepted was that of Ákos Eleőd, then working in the studio of György Vadász. He took the title of Gyula Illyés's famous poem, "One Sentence about Tyranny", as a name for the park. In the description of the work submitted for the competition: "beyond the reservation-type confinement of a mass of statues in a single place, the work aims at a proper presentation of the various works, free of ironic overtones (this is not an amusement park, anything but), and wishes to provide a critique of the ideology assisting at the birth of these sculptures by the mood of *the park as a whole*, by an emphatic use of certain elements described below."

A major role is played by the starting "scene wall" with a tympanum (Marx, Engels and Lenin) and by the closing "ending wall" (where Captains Steinmetz and Ostiapenko have been set). Between these two points there are winding, "endless walks" containing the individuals and concepts of the workers' movement. The monuments and tablets are contained within the fenced walls of paths that re-

Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

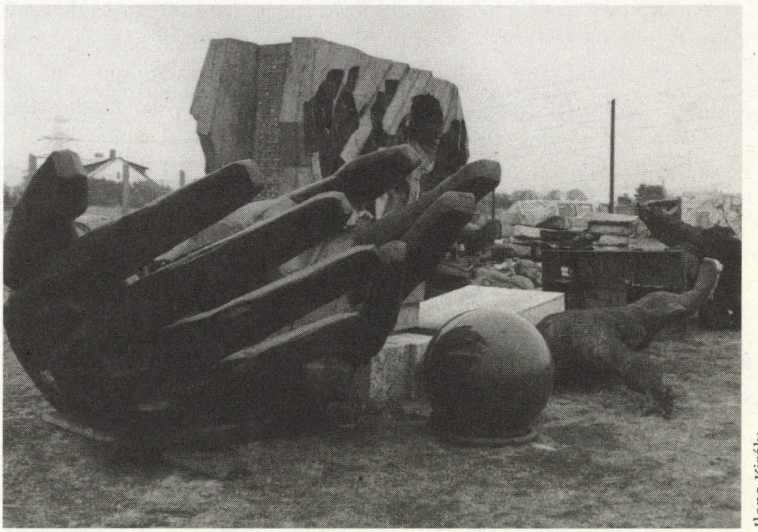
Ilona Király

Awaiting re-erection. October 1992.

turn petal-style to the main route. The central motif of the park is, here too, a flower star.

Ultimately, 41 statues have been placed in the sculpture park, the earliest of which is the figure of the Soviet soldier from Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl's Liberation Memorial (1947), and the latest the statue of the Social Democrat leader Árpád Szakasits (1988). The actual construction followed the immanent logic of the plan, so that the park is closed to works made after that date.

The progress of the project was being followed with immense interest already at the time the statues were being removed from their original sites. The press gave a running account of the lifting and removal of statues whose turn had come with



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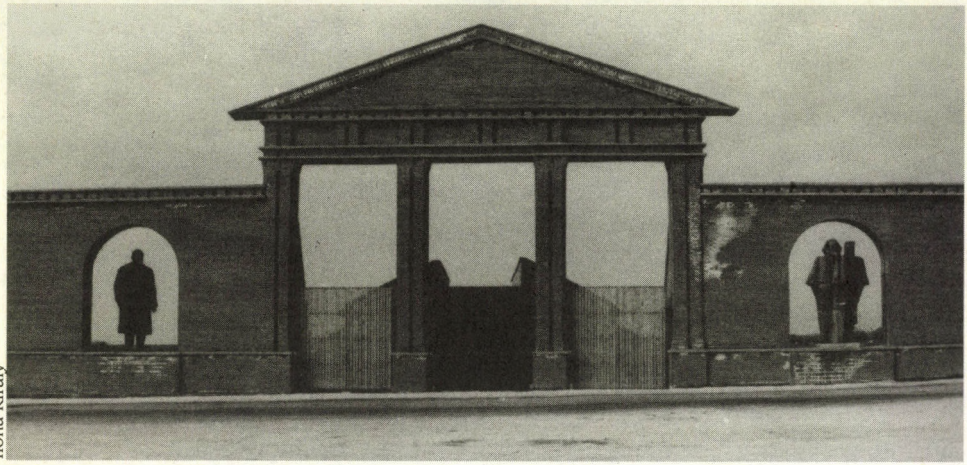

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Views of the Sculpture Park, March 1993. Design by Ákos Eleőd

front-page photographs. More than a hundred foreign journalists arrived to report on the building of the "Socialist Waxworks Museum" or "Communist Theme Park". It was clear that most foreign visitors came with views firmly set beforehand, bringing along the image they wanted to see, and did not let themselves be influenced by what they actually saw.

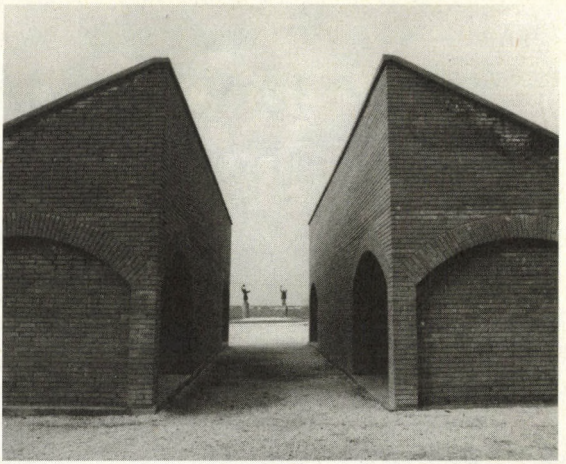
An inauguration ceremony for the sculpture park (which opened temporarily on 27 August 1993, as it is not completely finished yet) was conducted to a scenario drawn up by Péter Bacsó, who directed the film *The Witness*. The show, with its somewhat forced humour ("The First National Rally of Socialist Sculptures")—the inaugural address, the recital of a poem, marches played on an accordion, and the ceremonial cutting of the tape by "Comrade Bástya", a character in Bacsó's movie—was one of the events in the Budapest Fair, a festival commemorating the day the last Russian troops left Hungary. The setting was not really appropriate for an event of this type because, although the sculptures had been put between quotation marks as it were by Ákos Eleőd, he took meticulous care to avoid presenting them as the items on display in a humorous waxworks museum. The Hungarian and foreign audience were satisfied: they had been offered a sequel to the previous year's performance (a wittier one, too), the wrapping of the Liberation Memorial by Tamás Szentjóby.

Like anything else, the sculpture park can be approached in an ironic (though not parodistic) manner; however the statues themselves are not really flamboyant, and show little of the extravagant expressivity, often carried to absurd extremes, of the Socialist Realist (or "SocReal") style in favour at the time. On the other hand, one cannot forget that some Soviet memorials are in the proximity of burial grounds, and many monuments were associated with scenes of death often familiar from newsreels as well.

The detached observer sees rather poor images repeated *ad nauseam* (like the "girl with bird" motif) which, out of their environment, have become pathetic. If anything, they have lost the fairy-tale-like power praised by so many poets—about Lenin's statue, pulled down by the enemy but standing in its place the next day again, leading the fight until the final victory.

The monuments will, for a long time to come, be surrounded by the misty aura of the history they carry along with them-

selves, the mood of decorative wreathings of May Day parades. István Kiss's "Workers' Movement Memorial" (Hűvösvölgy, 1976) had to go simply because of its title, for the two protecting hands constitute a symbol so universal that it was used in the 1980s even by SZETA, a dissident movement supporting the poor.



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The construction of the sculpture park continues, since, without service buildings and a suitable technical background, it may lose its attraction. As an object of study it will probably endure, whether from the viewpoint of art or history. But historians had better pay attention to the present as well: the motives may have changed but not the wish to erect sculptures in public places.

The artist János Fajó has already voiced his disquiet: "Sadly enough, the process may be repeated under any ideology. Things can be substituted. It may not be really necessary to dissemble these statues at all. It may suffice to make heads that can simply be screwed on and off, replaced with others if need be. I am afraid that in the new political constellation, too, every party, every new authority will attempt to cast its ideas into bronze, carve them into stone or mount them on a horse. There must be some kind of magic there. Bronze, stone, marble: they are a special medium. A medium that can be used to commit ideological rape, to violate people's minds." ❧

Courtesy of the Municipal Archives of Budapest

Ilona Király

István Vida

János Kádár and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968

In a series of sessions held between January 3 and January 5, 1968, the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (CSCP) decided to separate the functions of the president of the republic and of the first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Alexander Dubček, First Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party, was appointed in place of Antonin Novotny as First Secretary of the CSCP. Novotny's supporters were replaced by four new members in the Presidential Council. These changes at the top of the CSCP, while causing much surprise all over the world, had a rather mixed reception in the Eastern bloc. East Germany disapproved of the dismissal. Nor was the change in personnel welcome in Warsaw or Sofia. Although not without reservations, the Soviet political leadership accepted Dubček, who had grown up in the Soviet Union, and studied at the Moscow Party College, and at that time was not one of the reformers within the Communist Party. Novotny's fall was ultimately decided by Brezhnev's refusal to stand by him. The Hungarian party leadership welcomed the changes. Novotny's dismissal came as no surprise to János Kádár, who had been informed about the internal strife in the CSCP by Brezhnev as far back as the middle of December. He had, of course, no way of knowing that Dubček was going to be Novotny's successor.[1]

On January 20 and 21, 1968 (even before making an official journey to Moscow in keeping with the practices of the times), Dubček met János Kádár, in complete secrecy, on a hunting trip in Slovakia. The purpose was to make personal contact and to keep each other informed. For the new First Secretary of the CSCP, frustrated by the mixed reception his election was given abroad, Hungary was both an example to be followed, and a potential ally. By the same token, Hungary, the country where after two years of preparation, reform of the command economy began in January 1968, was interested in Czechoslovakia choosing reform, and thus preventing Hungary's isolation within the Socialist bloc. The two had already met in 1964, and again in 1966. Dubček held Kádár in high esteem, trusting him without reservations.[2]

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a historian, heads a research group at the Institute for History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His field is post-1945 Hungarian and diplomatic history.

The atmosphere of this hunting party and that of the approximately six–hour private conversation that took place on the evening of January 20, was good. Dubček spoke openly and frankly, providing a detailed account of the January session of the CSCP, together with the reasons for Novotny's dismissal and their personal and political disagreements. He also briefed Kádár on the internal situation of the party, as well as mentioning his own plans and the progress made on the party's Action Programme. He also spoke about his personal problems and fears, pointing out that the changes at the top of the CSCP affected neither the leading role of the party nor its relations with "fraternal" parties and the international working class movement. According to the surviving documents, Kádár spoke only in very general terms. He mentioned the importance of a thoughtful handling of the economic, political and nationality problems; he cautiously supported Czechoslovakia's reorganization along the lines of a federal state. "Winning the support of the working class is of paramount importance," he advised Dubček, while warning him that a good relationship between the people and the party had to be maintained, as well as between the intelligentsia and the party. Kádár advised Dubček to be patient; he argued that the largely unfavourable international reception of his appointment was due to his being relatively unknown abroad.

Kádár informed Brezhnev by telephone about his meeting with Dubček and about the good impression Dubček had made on him.

At their January 23 session, the Politburo of the HSWP heard and endorsed János Kádár's report. Members of the Politburo concurred in the view that Hungary should continue "to make friends" with the new Czechoslovak party leadership, lending cautious support to Dubček.[3]

The first official and public meeting between Kádár and Dubček took place in Komarno on February 4, 1968, with the CP Secretaries in charge of foreign relations also attending. These informal and cordial talks were focused on current foreign affairs, the war in Vietnam, the German question, the problems of the Near East. On all this there was complete agreement. Dubček gave an account of his two–day visit to Moscow as head of a party delegation in late January, stressing the Soviet leaders' promise to give every assistance to the new Czechoslovak leadership. The CSCP also planned to hold their Fourteenth Congress in 1970. Dubček revealed that the party wished to change its authoritarian style of leadership, that victims of persecution would be rehabilitated, and that steps would be taken to separate the party and the state. Dubček's decision to put the question of Hungarian–Czechoslovak relations on the agenda was favourably received by the Hungarian delegates. Kádár was, however, much more reserved on this occasion than he had been during their first encounter. He hardly mentioned Hungarian domestic affairs, or the introduction of the economic reforms. Nor did he comment on the planned political reforms described by Dubček. He focused mainly on foreign affairs, most notably on the preparations for the forthcoming consultation of Communist parties in Budapest. He did take up the issue of the improvement of bilateral relations between the two countries, also putting forward a few suggestions.

Once again, the Hungarian delegates left with a good impression. They concluded that Dubček had "great sympathy" for the policies and working methods of the HSWP.[4]

The series of events commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the commu-

nist takeover in Czechoslovakia were held in Prague on February 22 and 23; they were attended by Brezhnev and the other leaders of the East–bloc countries, including Ceausescu and representatives of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. At that time it was not just Dubček who was cheered in Prague: so was the Soviet Union. Brezhnev, Gomulka and Kádár wanted to demonstrate to the Czechoslovak people, and to the world, that the new Czechoslovak leadership and its programme for reviving socialism through reforms, enjoyed united support.

On March 23, just one month after that spectacular demonstration of unity in Prague, the first meeting of the leaders of the East–bloc countries was held in Dresden. There was only one item on the agenda: the domestic affairs of Czechoslovakia. Preparations were controlled from Moscow by Brezhnev personally. After showing some hesitation, the Czechoslovak party leadership finally agreed to attend. Kádár and the top leadership of the HSWP had mixed feelings. At the March 19 session of the Political Committee, several speakers felt that such a meeting might damage the CSCP, adversely affecting its prestige, giving comfort to the opposition, party and non–party alike, urging radical reforms, and might have adverse reactions abroad. Finally, it was decided that, if the other parties requested it, then the HSWP would send representatives to Dresden. On March 19, Kádár briefed Brezhnev on the phone about the HSWP's reservations.[5]

In Dresden, the top party and government officials of six countries sat around the negotiating table (The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, East Germany, Poland and Hungary). The Romanians were not invited, despite Kádár's insistence. He also failed in an attempt to exclude the Bulgarians. Dubček briefed the others on the Czechoslovak situation. Although no joint minutes were taken, the handwritten, and rather sketchy, notes of János Kádár allow one to conclude that basically two issues were discussed: the evaluation of the political situation in Czechoslovakia and the proper course of action for the CSCP to take. The keynote was struck by Brezhnev, who passionately voiced his anxieties and fears, in places highly critical yet never offensive. He described the situation in Czechoslovakia as "counter–revolutionary". His main objection was that, with the abolition of censorship, the party had lost control over the media, which, in turn, openly criticized it over the air. He expressed his dismay over certain signs in foreign and economic policy, indicating a shift towards the West. He called it revealing that demands for restoring the democratic system of Masaryk—a bourgeois democracy, that is—could be expressed. Furthermore, he objected to the fact that Novotny had been replaced as President of the Republic, following pressure by the media and public opinion, and that just one day before the Dresden meeting. He made a passionate appeal to the Czechoslovak leaders to deal with these dangerous phenomena. Gomulka, who had been asked by the Soviets before the meeting to show restraint, agreed with Brezhnev, but the words he used were much harsher. "In Prague the counter–revolution walks at large," he announced bombastically. His main objection was that the Czechoslovak leadership had failed to show resolve. "There is no governing," he screamed at Dubček. Dubček made more mistakes in three months than Novotny had in ten years, he argued. Ulbricht, who had also been asked by Brezhnev to show restraint, said nothing about a counter–revolution; he gave a lecture on the differences in developments in Czechoslovakia and East Germany and the mistakes made by the CSCP. He strongly criti-

Extract from János Kádár's report to the Political Committee of the HSWP on January 23, 1968

About six or eight days ago a message came from Comrade Dubcek... This was followed by this meeting that was actually held in two places. One was a well-known game reserve north of Érsekújvár; our meeting lasted three hours, but since no accommodation was available there, we were moved to a hunting lodge near Tapolcsianky, about one-and-a-half-hours away. After another brief shoot there, we packed up and moved to yet another house. It was there that I had a private conversation with Comrade Dubcek before dinner for two or more hours; then we had dinner together and continued the conversation...

The atmosphere was very good, and our conversation very frank. One of the things Comrade Dubcek said was that there was not another soul in the world with whom he would have been able to discuss the same subjects in the same manner, for obvious reasons.

Comrade Dubcek was in a rather "miserable" condition physically. He was always a thin man and he has shed another five kilos in this wrangle. His nerves were also worn out; but no longer to the same degree now. He was very grateful to us for agreeing to have this talk, and those with him [i.e., Dubcek's entourage, I.V.] said explicitly that it is very good that we have come together, because Comrade Dubcek was very much in need of an informal talk.

In other respects—and this also has to be said—Comrade Dubcek made a very good impression on me, somebody who had known him before; he made a very good impression on me in the sense that he displayed no signs of triumph or arrogance—in fact quite the contrary. In a certain sense he feels bitter about being singled out for this post; he is aware of the problems and of the responsibility, and suffers a great deal because of this.

It is my opinion and judgement that Comrade Dubcek is, as regards all important issues, a true and principled Communist. This even applies to subjective matters, such as his judgement of Comrade Novotny. He bears no grudge or anything...

I told him that we were happy about his election, that we congratulated him and wished him good health as well as great success in his work, but I also mentioned to him that on the way I had decided to greet him with the words: Congratulations and deepest sympathy.

The minutes of the January 23, 1968 meeting of the HSWP's Political Committee.

cized the Czechoslovak press which had, in his opinion, created a right-wing mood in the country and had made wholly unfounded attacks on East Germany. Representing Bulgaria in place of Zhivkov, who was on an official visit in Turkey, Stanko Todorov sided with Gomulka. "The situation is complicated and dangerous; we in Bulgaria are worried," he declared. Both in content and in tone, Kádár's speech was different. He disagreed with both Brezhnev and with Gomulka on whether there was a counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia, arguing that at worst it was a pre-counter-revolutionary scenario. Kádár admitted that worrying indications did exist, but unlike Brezhnev, Gomulka and Ulbricht, he recommended a political solution, rather than administrative and police methods and the use of force. The party must provide leadership, he said. He once again stressed the importance of unity and a solid organizational structure within the party. He was the only one among the leaders present to emphasize the need for a struggle on two fronts, calling attention to the importance of being on guard against conservative Stalinist forces. The one area where he was in agreement with Gomulka was cadre policy; on this issue Kádár, too, felt that the CSCP should be firmly in control.

Although from slightly different viewpoints, each member of the Czechoslovak delegation—Dubček, Lenart, Cernik, and even Bilak—disagreed wholeheartedly with the analysis by Brezhnev and Gomulka. Without disputing that the political situation in Czechoslovakia was critical, that the party was under pressure and was losing control over the media, and that the right-wing trends were noticeable, the Czechoslovak delegation was united in the opinion that the situation was not counter-revolutionary. The mainstream political movements were, in their own word, "pro-socialist" and, therefore, socialism was not in danger. They claimed that the CSCP was able to retain control over social and political developments.[6]

János Kádár and the Hungarian delegation returned from Dresden in low spirits. They had not liked the atmosphere. The one-sided and preconceived handling of the Czechoslovak problem by the Soviets was in itself an ominous sign; they were also disappointed by Gomulka's rigid approach. They felt that the other socialist countries' trust in Hungary was decreasing. Nevertheless, the Hungarian party leadership continued to give open support to the changes in Czechoslovakia.

In an interview broadcast on March 26, 1968, Zoltán Komócsin, the Secretary of the HSWP Central Committee responsible for foreign relations, declared that "as for us, we approve of the policies of our comrades in the CSCP," assuring the CSCP and "all the forces of socialism in Czechoslovakia" "of the continuing support and solidarity of the HSWP".[7] This was reiterated in János Kádár's speech to the Conference of the Patriotic People's Front on April 18.[8]

A Czechoslovak delegation of party and government officials led by Dubček visited Hungary between June 12 and June 15, 1968. On June 14, the leaders of the two countries signed a new agreement of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance valid for the next twenty years. The Czechoslovak delegation left Hungary perfectly satisfied. Dubček announced: "We, the entire delegation and myself, are satisfied with our visit. The negotiations with the Hungarian leaders raised our spirits, because we understand each other well."[9]

After the Dresden meeting, sometime in late March and in the first half of April, the top Soviet leadership changed tactics. The essential elements of the new approach were: the exercise of pressure—political, diplomatic, ideological and even military—

on Prague, splitting the Czechoslovak party leadership, the formation of, and support for, a "left–wing" and pro–Soviet group (led by Bilak and Indra) in opposition to Dubček, and the instigation of the Soviet satellites against Czechoslovakia. The preparations for a possible military intervention most probably began in early April.[10] Marshal Yakubovsky, the Warsaw Pact Commander–in–Chief, arrived in Prague on April 24, asking the Czechoslovak government's permission for the armed forces of the Pact to hold their military exercise on Czechoslovak territory.[11] Dubček was summoned to Moscow for May 4, and was reprimanded once again for the political developments in Czechoslovakia, most notably the increasingly frequent attacks in the media on the Soviet Union. Then, on May 17, Prime Minister A. N. Kosygin arrived in Czechoslovakia for "medical treatment".[12]

The next round of talks held by the first secretaries—the first Dubček did not attend—was arranged to take place in Moscow on May 8, in complete secrecy. (Kádár was invited on May 6 personally by Kosygin over the telephone, and was asked to travel to Moscow urgently and *incognito*, in order to discuss the Czechoslovak situation.) In describing the negotiations held by the Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders four days earlier, Brezhnev expressed his dissatisfaction with the meeting and branded the Czechoslovak reform movement as unequivocally counter–revolutionary. The Soviets made it quite clear that, unless there were changes in the Czechoslovak political situation, tougher measures might follow. From the available sources it cannot be determined whether the idea of a military intervention was suggested at this level; what is a fact, however, is that Brezhnev primarily wanted to enlist the support of the socialist countries' leaders in putting pressure on Dubček to allow joint military exercise to take place in Czechoslovakia, something that Dubček had refused in Moscow. Another heated debate ensued, and János Kádár was once again the odd man out. In disagreement with Gomulka, Ulbricht and Zhivkov, who all accepted the Soviet evaluation, Kádár declared: "At the moment there is no counter–revolution in Czechoslovakia; what is taking place is a struggle to correct the mistakes of the past." Without denying the existence of certain dangerous elements in the Czechoslovak political situation (the lack of determination in the party leadership, as well as the emergence of "anti–socialist" forces, i.e., a non–party opposition), Kádár stood by Dubček and his colleagues and disagreed with Gomulka who said that Bilak and his associates should be supported and played off against Dubček. Kádár made the point several times that any attempt to interfere in Czechoslovak domestic affairs would only benefit the opposition in the country. By referring to the events of 1956 in Hungary, he firmly pointed out that the crisis in Czechoslovakia would not be resolved through the use of military force, and that a political solution must be found. Without actually raising any objection against the Warsaw Pact military exercise in Czechoslovakia, he said that political considerations should overweigh everything else.

Despite the differences of opinion, the party leaders assented to the joint exercise in Czechoslovakia; furthermore, they granted the Soviet request not to support the Action Programme of the CSCP in their media and in the various social and intellectual organizations in their own countries. They decided to keep in touch and, if necessary, to meet again.[13]

In late May, the unsuspecting Czechoslovak government gave permission to hold an exercise for military staffs, which then took place between June 20 and June 30.

The first signs of a near-imperceptible change in the Hungarian attitude became noticeable in the second half of June; the definite—although not dramatic—turn came in mid-July. This was related to the fact that the political situation in Czechoslovakia had grown tenser, the reform movement had become polarized, with the radical wing of the party showing sympathy for the Yugoslav model. Meanwhile, the non-party opposition began to make it clear that they wanted to restore parliamentary democracy and a multi-party system. By June 18, approximately 70 political organizations had applied for official recognition, although only one of them, a small human-rights organization, had actually been given the green light. The formation and activities of an explicitly right-wing organization, called K-231, uniting former political prisoners, as well as that of KAN, (Club of Engaged Non-Party People), were events known by Budapest. A steering committee aiming to revive the SDP had held meetings. "2000 Words" a pamphlet by Ludvig Vaculik and signed by several prominent public figures, was part of this process. It demanded political pluralism and people were urged to open resistance and civil disobedience; people were also advised to solve political problems locally, completely by-passing the CSCP.

The Hungarian party leadership found two things intolerable: one was an article by O. Machatka in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Imre Nagy's execution, which explicitly declared that he had been innocent, and the other was the pamphlet "2000 Words". Machatka's article was attacked in the daily, *Népszabadság*, in an unusually vicious tone.[14] Vaculik's pamphlet was branded as an attack on socialism and, for the first time, administrative measures were demanded on both counts.[15]

On Soviet initiative, the party heads of the five Warsaw Pact countries—after preliminary consultation—addressed the Central Committee of the CSCP in separate letters, requesting another meeting for the discussion of the Czechoslovak situation. (Kádár's letter was delivered on July 5.) On its July 8 meeting, however, the Presidium of the CSCP passed a unanimous resolution not to attend the meeting, scheduled to take place on July 11 in Warsaw. For tactical reasons, the Presidium decided to recommend bilateral talks instead; at the same time they announced the decision to attend fuller conferences only if all the socialist countries, including Yugoslavia and Romania, would be represented. Behind the rejection of the proposal, (which, from a Soviet satellite, almost amounted to an act of rebellion) there was the belief that, despite the emergence of the non-party opposition, their party would remain securely in power: its popularity and influence on the people was increasing rather than decreasing, enabling them to follow a more independent line not only at home but also in foreign politics. At the same time, the Czechoslovak leadership was suspicious of the motives of the Soviet, Polish and East-German leaders; the Soviet component in the joint exercise refused to leave the country after the exercise had finished, ignoring Czechoslovak requests to do so. In fact, having tapped Marshal Yakubovsky's telephone, the Czechoslovak leaders found out that the Soviets planned to stay until September.

The Presidium of the CPSU's Central Committee was shocked by the refusal. Kádár was able to sense this from a telephone conversation with Brezhnev on July 9. He made two proposals on behalf of the HSWP: on the one hand, he suggested that the CPSU agree to a separate meeting with the representatives of the CSCP's Central Committee on short notice, even within

The July 12, 1968 resolution of the Political Committee of the HSWP

The Political Committee has decided to nominate Comrade János Kádár and Comrade Jenő Fock to represent the Central Committee of the HSWP at a series of meetings, beginning July 14 in Warsaw, to be attended by representatives of the five fraternal parties.

At the meeting our delegation is to represent the already known position of the Central Committee and the Political Committee. A political solution must be found for settling the Czechoslovak situation and the representatives of the other fraternal parties must be warned against military intervention.

The Political Committee declares that the Presidium of the CSCP Central Committee has committed a grave mistake when rejecting the fraternal parties' proposal for a consultation.

The minutes of the meeting held by the HSWP Political Committee on July 12, 1968.

the next few days; secondly that, in response to the Czechoslovak explanation of their refusal, (that more time would be needed for preparations for the talks), the six–party conference be postponed to a date seven or ten days later. In case the Czechoslovak leaders refused, they should be informed officially that the other five members of the Warsaw Pact would hold a separate meeting. Kádár was obviously trying to buy time for Dubček and his associates in the hope that they might go back on their earlier refusal.

The top leadership of the CPSU immediately accepted the Hungarian Party's recommendations, with the additional observation that the five fraternal parties should respond to the Czechoslovak "no" by a joint letter, and that the five–party conference should be held come what may. In the meantime Dubček and his associates continued to push for a separate meeting between the CSCP and the CPSU, although the tone was "softer" now. Since this was interpreted in Moscow as delaying tactics and, in effect, as the rejection of the six–party conference, the Politburo of the CPSU proposed to hold the five–party meeting in Warsaw on July 14. They also suggested that the joint letter should be handed over as soon as possible. To leave the door open for a Czechoslovak retreat, Kádár suggested a few amendments to the draft of the letter, but these were rejected by the Soviets. Then, on July 11, N. V. Podgorny, the Chairman of the Supreme Council, asked Kádár's assent to the proposition that, when handing over the letter signed by the five party leaders, Chervonenko, the Soviet ambassador, be allowed to reveal the date of the meeting of the first secretaries in Warsaw, so that the Czechoslovak leaders would still have time to change their minds by July 14. Kádár gave his assent.[16]

After such preliminaries, the Political Committee of the HSWP decided, on July 12, to send representatives to the Warsaw

meeting. It was agreed, nevertheless, that a political solution must be found to normalize the Czechoslovak situation, and that the HSWP should not support the planned military intervention.[17]

On the evening of the very same day, July 12, the Czechoslovak party leadership once again approached Budapest with a request for Dubček and Cernik to meet Kádár.[18] Hoping to be able to prevent a rift and a further worsening of relations within the Eastern bloc, Kádár would have liked to see a Czechoslovak delegation at the Warsaw meeting. He therefore agreed to the meeting.

This secret meeting between Kádár and Dubček was arranged to take place on the afternoon of July 13 in Komarno. At the meeting, which was nowhere near as friendly as earlier meetings had been, Dubček made it clear that he resented the conduct of the fraternal parties, and protested at the joint declaration of the five parties and the convocation of the Warsaw conference. He defended the July 8 decision of the CSCP's Presidium, maintaining that any interference in Czechoslovak domestic affairs by the CPSU, or by any other parties, was unacceptable. He reiterated that they did not completely rule out the idea of an international conference, provided that discussion of the Czechoslovak situation was not the sole item on the agenda. They argued for bilateral talks, on the grounds that they were in disagreement not only with the CPSU, but also with the Polish, East–German and Bulgarian parties. Nor did Dubček try to conceal his resentment over Soviet military units' prolonging their stay in Czechoslovakia after the military exercise had come to an end.

This time Kádár set a much harsher tone than he had done on previous occasions. He rebuked Dubček for his refusal to attend the Warsaw meeting, calling that his worst mistake since January 1968. He also pointed out that the Czechoslovak leaders' conduct troubled the relationship of the six countries within the Warsaw Pact, to the detriment of Czechoslovakia, and at the same time placing the HSWP, and Kádár himself, in a precarious position. He also repeated Brezhnev's argument on limited sovereignty (something Kádár had earlier resisted doing under similar circumstances), saying that the Czechoslovak crisis was the concern of the entire international working–class movement, and that the need to find a joint solution for the Czechoslovak problem had to take precedence over any feelings of resentment, no matter how justified that may have been, as well as over any fear of losing sovereignty. Kádár also called Dubček's attention to the fact that both Romania and Yugoslavia had their own specific interests and that it was far from certain that they would be reliable allies. Creating closer ties with those two countries would clearly lead to further deterioration in the already tense relationship between Moscow and Prague. Kádár urged the Presidium of the CSCP to sit down at the negotiating table with the Soviet leaders and settle their differences. Kádár, as well as Prime Minister Jenő Fock, who also attended the meeting, used the opportunity to mention the HSWP's own resentment, most notably over Machatka's article.

This harsh tone took Dubček and his delegation by surprise; they had not expected such strong criticism from the Hungarian leaders, who had up till then supported them. "Apparently, that was the moment that they realized how far they had become estranged," the minutes of the meeting reveal. "In that phase of the discussion, both leaders broke down. In their confusion, they both acknowledged that they had come to a dead end; they kept repeating that—in their view—the bilateral

talks should culminate in a multilateral discussion."[19] Still, the discussion did have some effect: the Presidium of the CSCP's Central Committee sent a letter to Brezhnev in Warsaw, telling him that they were ready to start talks with the CPSU immediately, and that they did not rule out the possibility of attending a wider conference. In comparison to their resolution of June 8, this letter was a major concession, but it had come too late.

The meeting in Warsaw took place on June 14 and 15. Because of their prior discussions with Dubček, the Hungarian delegation was received with undisguised animosity. "We sat through the Warsaw meeting, feeling like scabs," Kádár complained at the August 7 meeting of the Central Committee of the HSWP, "and that was also how the others pictured us."[20] The meeting was held in a tense, jittery atmosphere. Gomulka spoke first and the heads of the other delegations followed suit. Kádár addressed the meeting twice. The differences of opinion in the evaluation of the Czechoslovak situation continued to be great; the arguments ran much the same as before, although roles had changed to some extent. Though not actually on the agenda, military intervention was the main issue, as all participants well knew. Gomulka was more restrained this time; instead of talking of a counter-revolution, he warned about the danger of the CSCP's becoming a social-democratic party and Czechoslovakia's turning into a capitalist country, giving the forthcoming 16th Conference of the CSCP, brought forward to September 7, as a possible date for such radical changes. He stressed firmly that the Czechoslovak crisis could not be dealt with by force, and certainly not military force. Kádár sided with Gomulka, sharing his opinion as far as the social-democratic tendencies, bourgeois restoration and the military intervention were concerned. A new element in Kádár's speech was his description of the Czechoslovak political system as being "Yugoslav in character", capable of increasing the threat of a bourgeois counter-revolution. But he stressed that the counter-revolution had not won in Czechoslovakia.

Unlike in Moscow, where Gomulka had taken the lead in the attacks against the Hungarian position, here it was Ulbricht and Zhivkov who joined issue with the Hungarian delegates. Ulbricht, who repeated his phobias about a possible imperialist intervention, counter-revolutionary footholds and ideological terror, reacted to Kádár's speech by rudely criticizing the HSWP's conduct in the entire Czechoslovak crisis, going as far as declaring—to the surprise of the Hungarian delegates—that Hungary could be the next country where the socialist system would be shaken by the imperialists' intervention. He proposed another military demonstration in Slovakia. Zhivkov, whose views were the most extreme, also denounced the Hungarian position, declaring that the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries had already used up all the political options. He openly advocated military intervention. Brezhnev spoke in a more restrained tone; nevertheless, what he basically said was that the counter-revolutionary threat had increased in Czechoslovakia and if the CSCP was unable to resolve the problem on its own, then it was "the right and the duty of the socialist countries to help." He did not, however, openly argue in favour of military intervention; on the contrary, he proposed that the five parties should send a warning letter to Prague, demanding a firmer line against the "counter-revolutionary" forces.

Since this was the first occasion since 1956 that two fraternal parties had openly criticized the HSWP at an international conference, Kádár decided to speak again.

Without directly responding to the criticism put forward by Ulbricht and Zhivkov, he declared that the Hungarian party line on Czechoslovakia was responsible and that they stood by it. Eventually the conference decided that—in accordance with the views of Kádár and Gomulka—no steps should be taken which were likely to disturb public opinion in the other socialist countries and in Czechoslovakia, and which could be interpreted by the West as intervention. Consequently, the participants all voted for the sending of another letter. They also decided, however, that, unless the Presidium of the CSCP chose to cooperate, links should be established with the "healthy forces" within the CSCP, namely, the pro–Soviet Bilak–Indra group; in that case this latter group must be given all the necessary support to enable them to challenge the legitimate leaders of the party. Furthermore, it was also decided that, as a last chance, another round of bilateral meetings between the Soviet and the Czechoslovak leaders should be arranged. (The most ardent support for this, eventually approved by Brezhnev and Kosygin, came from Kádár.)[21]

The letter handed over in Prague on July 16, reflected the Soviet view and arguments, albeit somewhat toned down, and ignored the extreme–left views of the East–German and Bulgarian leaders. The most that the Hungarian delegation was able to achieve, with some support from the Poles, was the inclusion of a paragraph condemning the entire Novotny era and past mistakes. In addition to the already voiced demands, the joint letter now contained a new element, the deployment of "all available defensive forces", including the army, the police, and the workers' militia, was openly urged against the "anti–socialist forces", i.e. the non–party opposition. Ignoring Brezhnev's personal plea, the Presidium of the CSCP rejected the criticism and essentially left the demands of the "five parties" unanswered.

Moscow reacted by initiating serious measures. Three crucial motions were passed at the meeting held by the Presidium of the CPSU on July 19 and 20, 1968, presumably after serious debate. The more moderate members of the top leadership, Brezhnev included, were able to persuade the CPSU to make one more attempt to come to an agreement with Prague, and the Presidium accepted the CSCP's offer of July 14 of another bilateral meeting. At the same time, it was decided that, in conjunction with the negotiations, contingency plans for the occupation of Czechoslovakia must be prepared and that units of the Warsaw Pact countries to be deployed in the invasion must be put on alert. It was also decided that, in accordance with the resolution of the Warsaw meeting, links should be established with Bilak's group, the so–called "left–wing" of the CSCP Presidium, in order to present a political alternative.[22]

In all probability, it was P. J. Shelest, the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, who, on behalf of the CPSU Politburo, informed the Hungarian party leadership on July 20 or 21 of the decision to begin preparations for the invasion of Czechoslovakia, at the same time conveying a Soviet appeal for the participation of the Hungarian army. (Naturally, similar requests were made through military channels.[23]) After consulting a number of high–ranking politicians, including Prime Minister Jenő Fock, Kádár assented, on behalf of the HSWP, to Hungarian participation in military action. There has been no evidence so far to confirm whether or not there was any preliminary discussion of the Soviet request in the Political Committee of the HSWP. The Hungarian assent was highly welcome to the Soviet

party leadership. Speaking on behalf of the Presidium of the CPSU, Brezhnev expressed his gratitude for the positive response, declaring in highly emotional tone, that "... this means so much to our party and friendship that I cannot find words to express it. I shall not forget this as long as I live."[24]

At the August 7 meeting of the Central Committee of the HSWP Kádár argued that political coercion made it no longer possible for the party to keep out of the conflict: "Theoretically, it would have been a perfectly possible option. We could have said that we were not going to participate in the military preparations. But what would have come of it? We saw the anxiety of our Soviet comrades, the Poles, the others, and, naturally, of our own, too, although in our case it was less pronounced. What would it have meant if we had said that we were not going to participate? In my view, it would have only created more anxiety. Nothing would have been achieved; on the contrary, it would have produced an even more complicated situation. Let me tell you quite frankly—since we know the situation, the circumstances—the people [i.e. the Soviet leaders] would have decided on an even more unpredictable course of action."[25] Furthermore, Kádár and his associates were fully aware of the fact that, had they decided to stay out of the conflict, their chances of exerting influence on events in Czechoslovakia and inside the Warsaw Pact, would have been small. At the same time, they also feared that Hungary might become the next target, in which case the economic reforms would have had to be scrapped.

The Czechoslovak and the Soviet delegations met on July 29 at Cierna na Tisou, Slovakia; negotiations lasted for four days and the atmosphere was that of an endgame. Brezhnev and his aides knew that military preparations for the invasion of Czechoslovakia were going ahead full steam. Dubček and his colleagues had no idea of what was going on. The Soviets deemed the situation as hopeless right from the start. In contrast, the Czechoslovak leadership were eager to settle the dispute, as they wanted, at any cost, to avoid a break with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. The negotiations ended with a surprising result. The Soviets consented to the CSCP's continuing the reforms on the basis of their Action Programme and to the holding of their special party congress. They also promised that in the future they would refrain from intervening in Czechoslovak domestic affairs. Dubček and his team promised to do everything in order to maintain the party's leading role; they also undertook to place the media under party control, to put an end to open criticism of fraternal countries and parties, to ban opposition parties and organizations, including the SDP, and to dismiss the most criticized officials—in other words, the radicals among the reform communists. In addition, the Czechoslovak delegation agreed to attend another six–party conference. The Soviet concessions were anything but honest, as became clear soon enough.[26]

The six–party meeting was held on August 3 and 4 in Bratislava. On the evening of August 2, however, the leaders of the "Five" held a separate meeting, in which Brezhnev gave an account of the negotiations at Cierna na Tisou. This report, which turned out to be a one–sided account of events, since it mostly dealt with the Czechoslovak promises, although the skepticism of the Soviets could also be discerned, was approved by the participants. The sole achievement of the six–party meeting was the publication of a joint declaration.[27] There was no mention in the document of the Czechoslovak situation,

nor was there any criticism of the CSCP's performance. Considerable emphasis was put on the cooperation of the socialist countries. The document did however, contain a remarkable contradiction. On the one hand it confirmed the principles laid down by the Bandung Conference, and on the other hand it approved the Brezhnev doctrine, the ideological basis for the socialist countries' limited sovereignty.

After Cierna na Tisou and Bratislava, the top leadership of the Soviet Union watched Czechoslovak developments on the jump. Brezhnev regularly telephoned Prague; he also wrote letters and memos, some on behalf of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee and some in his own name. In addition, the Soviets tried to exert pressure on Dubček's team through János Kádár. Even back in Bratislava, Kosygin had invited Kádár to take his holidays in the Soviet Union; the invitation was repeated by Brezhnev on August 7. Kádár spent four days at Yalta, where he had informal talks with Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny on the Czechoslovak crisis. Kádár reiterated the HSWP's views, frequently criticizing the conduct and tactics of the Soviets. He consistently maintained that political problems required political solutions, although he now added that military intervention was necessary when all other attempts failed. He tried to convince the Soviet leaders that the CPSU—because of its role played in the international working-class movement—could not appear as the "defender of the past"; it should support new approaches and it should resist the temptation of interfering in other parties' internal affairs. How much of Kádár's criticism was actually accepted by the Soviets is impossible to tell; what he did achieve, however, was a request from Brezhnev to talk to Dubček one more time.

The last round of talks between Dubček and Kádár, this time initiated by the Hungarians, was held in Komarno on August 17. The meeting, which lasted thirteen hours and was characterized by tension and uneasiness, proved to be futile. Kádár realized that he and Dubček were not speaking the same language and that the Czechoslovaks would not be able to keep the promises they had given in Cierna na Tisou and in Bratislava; he saw that the Czechoslovak leaders were going their own way, preparing the party congress. Kádár returned to Budapest with the conclusion that Dubček's team was unwilling, as well as unable, to carry out the promises they had given two weeks earlier.[28]

How much influence Kádár's evaluation of the Komarno talks had on the decision to launch the invasion of Czechoslovakia remains an open question—probably none whatsoever. The top-ranking representatives of the Five were summoned to Moscow on August 18, the date set for the invasion was approved, together with the Bilak-Indra group's plans for the transfer of power. To be able to arrange all this, however, the Presidium of the CPSU must have made their decision on the matter at least one or two days earlier. (That was also when Kádár learned about the planned date of the military action.) On August 20, the Political Committee of the HSWP agreed to Hungary's participation in the occupation of Czechoslovakia.[29] One Hungarian division, with approximately 12,000 men, was to be directly involved in the invasion.[30]

After August 21, 1968 the Hungarian party leadership no longer played the role of mediator. Although, according to some memoirs, Kádár later claimed that beside Svoboda, he, too, had something to do with Dubček's eventual release and invitation to attend the negotiations on August 23 between the Soviets and the Czechoslovaks, the events of the time do not suggest this. Between August 23 and 26 the leaders of the Five were also meeting in Moscow. However, only the Soviets nego-

tiated with the Czechoslovaks; the others were briefed by them. The representatives of the Five could do no more than comment on the outcome of the talks. On August 26, the Hungarian party leadership approved the agreement signed by the Soviets and the Czechoslovaks. In addition to carrying out the points of the agreement signed at Cierna na Tisou, in this document Dubček also undertook to invalidate the decisions of the Congress held on August 22, to dismiss large numbers of radical reformers, and to agree to a later legal arrangement permitting the stationing of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia.[31]

The Soviet party leadership later continued with the same methods they had employed during the negotiations in Moscow: they negotiated with Dubček and his team and only afterwards did they brief the leaders of the other four parties. The links between Hungarian party and government circles and the Czechoslovak leadership (i.e. not only with Dubček's team, but with the "left wing", also) became tenuous. The fact that Kádár severely reproached Bilak's group for not having the courage to admit publicly that they had called in the forces of the Warsaw Pact also contributed to this deterioration.[32] The Soviets continued to react to every single event in Czechoslovak domestic affairs, interfering in everything. Up to the middle of October, Brezhnev fairly regularly talked to Kádár over the phone, which meant a call every two or three days. The last top-level conference of the five leaders took place on September 17. This time there were no arguments; the participants assured the Soviets of their support in the handling of the Czechoslovak situation. This meant the end of the reform movement, "normalization"[33] in the official terminology. Kádár's last attempt to influence events in Czechoslovakia was a proposal to withdraw occupation troops at the earliest possible date. At the time of preparing the military agreement between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, Brezhnev still thought it important to seek Kádár's opinion. The agreement, which was signed on October 15, was important for Hungary, as it permitted the withdrawal of Hungarian troops from Czechoslovakia at an early date. Beginning with the second half of October, Brezhnev's telephone calls became less and less frequent. In late January he suggested to Kádár that perhaps another five or six-party conference should be arranged; this, however, never came to pass. Gradually, the Czechoslovak problem became the concern of Soviet foreign policy alone, with less and less importance being placed on the opinion of the allies.

In a famous interview broadcast by *Panoráma*, the current affairs programme of Hungarian Television in 1989, Dubček said that if Kádár and Gomulka had given him stronger support, they could have averted the Czechoslovak tragedy.[34] It seems that this is not true. Kádár underestimated his options, and perhaps gave in too soon; nevertheless, once the Soviet party leadership had made their decision, Kádár had no way of changing it. Brezhnev and his associates were primarily guided by considerations of Soviet security. No Soviet troops had previously been stationed in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet military command had always been anxious about easy access to Soviet territory through Czechoslovakia, making their defence system vulnerable at this point. Czechoslovakia's hypothetical withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact would have further exacerbated this vulnerability. In May 1968, Brezhnev did not beat about the bush when he said that "we shall never surrender you". Kádár himself had no intention of crossing Soviet plans. One of the corner-stones of his pol-

icy was full cooperation with the Soviet Union, including Hungary's falling into line with Soviet foreign policy and coordinating all steps. It clearly follows from the above that Kádár and his administration would have liked to avoid military intervention, but once it had been decided on in Moscow, the Hungarian leaders accepted it. Kádár was not a man likely to change his political principles. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Hungarian National Archives. 288. fond. 5/444 őrző egység (HNA 288. f. ... őe. hereafter). Minutes of the January 23, 1968 session of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP hereafter). János Kádár's report.

2 ■ It is worth remarking that in his autobiography Alexander Dubcek claims that this confidential meeting had in fact been proposed by János Kádár. This is not true. (*Hope Dies Last. The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek.* Ed. and translated by Jiri Hochman. Harper Collins. London, 1993, pp. 133–134. [Hereafter Dubcek: *The Autobiography.*])

3 ■ See HNA 288. f. 5/444. őe.

4 ■ HNA. 288. f. 5/445 őe. pp. 12–22. Minutes of the February 6, 1968 meeting the HSWP Political Committee. The minutes were published in: János Kádár: *Végakarat* (Last Will and Testament). He was interviewed by András Kanyó, who also selected the documents. The book was edited by Mária Veres. Published by Hírlapkiadó Vállalat. Budapest, 1989, pp. 229–231.

5 ■ HNA. 288. f. 5/451 őe. pp. 8–17. Minutes of the March 19, 1968 meeting of the HSWP Political Committee. János Kádár's briefing before the meeting proper. See also: Rezső Nyers: "Feljegyzések 1968–ból" (1968 Notes). *História*, 1993. vol. 9–10. pp. 38–39.

6 ■ See: HNA. 288. f. 5/452. őe. pp. 8–26. Minutes of the April 2, 1968 meeting of the Political Committee of the HSWP. János Kádár's report, together with the presentation "Report Addressed to the Political Committee and the Government of the Dresden Talks by the Leaders of Six Countries". See also: János Kádár: *Végakarat*, pp. 231–235.

7 ■ *Népszabadság*, March 27, 1968.

8 ■ *Ibid.*, April 19, 1968.

9 ■ *Ibid.*, June 16, 1968.

10 ■ The commander of the Soviet Army Group South, stationed in Hungary, received orders on April 8, 1968 to start preparations for a military operation aimed at occupying Czechoslovakia. The task assigned to "Army Group South" was the occupation of southern Moravia and southwestern Slovakia. For more detail see: Iván Pataky: "A Magyar Néphadsereg és az intervenció" (The Hungarian People's Army and the Invasion). *História*, 1993, vol. 9–10, p. 54. [Hereafter: Pataky: "A Magyar Néphadsereg"]

11 ■ *Népszabadság*, April 25, 1968.

12 ■ *Ibid.*, May 17, 21 and 28, 1968.

13 ■ See: HNA. 288. f. 5/455 őe. pp. 24–39. Supplement attached to the minutes of the May 14, 1968 meeting of the HSWP Political Committee: "Report on the May 8, 1968 Meeting of the First Secretaries of the Five Socialist Countries' Fraternal Parties in Moscow, Submitted to the Political Committee". Károly Erdélyi. May 11, 1968. Approved by János Kádár.

14 ■ *Népszabadság*, June 26, 1968.

15 ■ *Ibid.*,, June 30, 1968. Ferenc Várnai: "Kétszínű játék, kétezer szóval" (Double–Dealing, in Two Thousand Words).

16 ■ HNA. 288. f. 47/744 őe. Notes taken by Mrs Barta, Kádár's Russian language interpreter, dated July 11 1968.

17 ■ *Ibid.*, 5/455 őe. The minutes of the HSWP Political Committee meeting on June 12, 1968 only contain the resolution passed.

18 ■ In his autobiography, Dubcek claimed the opposite: according to his version, the meeting was initiated by Kádár. See: Dubcek: *The Autobiography.* p. 162.

19 ■ HNA. 288. f. 5/462 őe. Minutes of the HSWP Political Committee meeting on July 15, 1968. Presentation entitled "Comrade Kádár and Comrade Fock's Meeting with Comrade Dubcek and Comrade Cernik".

20 ■ HNA. 288. f. 4/93 őe. Minutes of the Central Committee meeting on August 7, 1968.

21 ■ *Ibid.*, f. 5/462 őe. Minutes of the HSWP Political Committee meeting on July 15, 1968. Presentation entitled "The Warsaw Meeting of July 15, 1968" and Kádár's account given at the August 7, 1968 Central Committee meeting. (HNA. 288. f. 4/93. Minutes of the Central Committee meeting on August 7, 1968.)

22 ■ Karen Dawisha: *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*. Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, London, Los Angeles, 1984, pp. 241–242.

23 ■ The document requesting the participation of the Hungarian army had been handed over to the Hungarian government on behalf of Marshal Grechko by Colonel General Tutarinov, who represented the High Command of the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact in Hungary, a few days earlier, on July 10, 1968, claiming that Brezhnev had already discussed the matter with Kádár. However, Kádár knew nothing of it, and therefore sent a message to Moscow to that effect. In the next few days the Soviets let the issue cool down a little. Actually, the "military exercise" was planned for the end of July, according to Marshal Grechko's briefing. (For more detail see: Pataky: "A Magyar Néphadsereg", pp. 54–55.

24 ■ 1990 communication to the author by the late György Aczél, formerly Secretary to the HSWP Central Committee, shortly before his death.

25 ■ HNA. 288. f. 4/93 őe. Minutes of the Central Committee meeting on August 7, 1968.

26 ■ ibid.

27 ■ *Népszabadság*, August 4, 1968.

28 ■ HNA. 288. f. 4/94 őe. Minutes of a closed meeting held jointly by the HSWP Central Committee and the Council of Ministers on August 23, 1968.

29 ■ See: Nyers, Rezső: "Feljegyzések 1968-ból."

30 ■ See: Pataky: "A Magyar Néphadsereg". p. 57.

31 ■ See: HNA. 288. f. 5/őe. Minutes of the HSWP Political Committee meeting on September 3, 1968.

32 ■ György Aczél's 1990 communication to the author.

33 ■ HNA. 288. f. 5/ őe. Minutes of the HSWP Political Committee meeting on October 1, 1968. Zoltán Komócsin's report.

34 ■ *Dubcek megszólal* (Dubcek Speaks). Text of a television interview by András Sugár. Budapest, 1989, p. 32.

Zsuzsa Urbach

Queen Mary of Hungary and the Renaissance in Flanders

Maria van Hongarije, koningin tussen keizers en kunstenaars, 1505–1558 (Mary, Queen of Hungary, Governor of the Netherlands, Patroness of the Arts 1505–1558). Museum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht and Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, 1993.

Mary of Hungary, Marie de Hongrie, Maria von Ungarn, that is Mary of Habsburg, known in Hungary as "the German Mary", married King Louis II of Hungary in 1522. As part of the policy at the back of the saw, *Bella gerant fortes, tu felix Austria nube,* she had already been conditionally bespoken to the future heir of the king of Hungary—as yet unborn—at the tender age of one. Mary was born in the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels as the daughter of Philip the Handsome, Duke of Burgundy and Joanna "the Mad" of Castile in 1505. Her grandfather, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, baptised her Mary in memory of her grandmother, his wife, who had died tragically when young. Following her father's early death and given her mother's insanity, she was raised at the Malines court of Margaret of Austria, her aunt, the Regent of the Netherlands. The humanist, music and art-loving court provided a stimulating environment for the talented girl, who proved to be a skilful musician. Maximilian had earlier concluded a double marriage agreement with Wladislaw II, King of Hungary; under this, Mary, from the age of nine, was brought up at the courts of Innsbruck and Vienna. In 1515, when Mary was ten, and Louis nine, the engagement took place in Vienna, at the same time as that of Ferdinand of Habsburg, the future Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary, Mary's brother (and brother to the Emperor Charles V) to Anna of Hungary, daughter of Wladislaw and sister to Louis. In 1521 Mary travelled to Buda via Visegrád. In 1522 she was crowned Queen of Hungary in Székesfehérvár, and that same year the marriage proper took place at the church of Our Lady in Buda. According to an old tradition, a green and gold dress in the Hungarian National Museum was her wedding gown.

Up to 1526, as the Queen of the King of Hungary, Mary held court in Sigismund's and Matthias' magnificent palace in Buda castle. Her favourite diversions were the chase, knightly jousts, music and dance, but her court also breathed the new spirit of the age and was an instrument through which the ideas of Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam reached Hungary.

Mary was barely twenty-one when she was widowed. Fleeing from the disastrous defeat of the Hungarian army by the Turks

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at Mohács on the 29th of August 1526, Louis was thrown by his horse and drowned in a brook. On the news of the lost battle reaching her, Mary had her goods and chattels, and the Royal Treasury, loaded onto carts and barges, and departed upriver for Pozsony (Pressburg, now Bratislava) and Vienna. The young widow enjoyed the sympathy of the whole of Europe. In 1526 Luther dedicated his translation of four Psalms as consolation to her and Erasmus wrote his *De vidua christiana* for her in 1529. In 1531 Charles V appointed her Governor of the Netherlands in succession to her aunt Margaret of Austria, an office she occupied up to 1555. In that year she followed the Emperor Charles V to Spain, after he had abdicated and handed over his Spanish domains to his son Philip II. Philip asked her to take up her office again but Mary died suddenly in Cigales in 1558, following a heart attack. She was only fifty-three. She kept a lock of her husband's hair in a locket of her necklace, and never took off her widow's weeds. Unlike her sister Eleonore of Austria, Queen of France, or her aunt Margaret of Austria, she never remarried.

In 1531 Mary moved into the huge palace in Brussels of the Dukes of Brabant, where she held office as the Regent of the Habsburg Netherlands. Her court was a centre of humanism and the arts. The purpose of the exhibitions organized in 1993 was to present not only her political role but also her patronage of the arts. As such the historical importance of the widowed Queen of Hungary is far more than that of a great tragic and romantic figure of her age. As ruler and patron of the arts she was no doubt one of the great women of the Renaissance. It is not merely the feminist fashion of our time that focuses on her. Her life spanned the whole of Renaissance Europe from its western marches in Spain to its eastern marches in Hungary. Indeed, she appropriately serves as a symbol for a Europe undergoing integration. In 1993 Antwerp was chosen as the cultural capital of Europe and Dutch museums, to add to the splendid exhibitions arranged in that great 16th and 17th century metropolis, deliberately centred on Mary of Hungary. This proved a great idea, and the double exhibition was a resounding success. True, every schoolboy in Belgium and the Netherlands was familiar with Queen Mary's name, but that was about all. Thanks to the efforts of historians, art historians and literary historians, an excellent display of Renaissance art could be brought together involving seventy-seven museums from nine countries. Belgium and the Netherlands had the lion's share but Hungary, Austria, France, Great Britain, and Spain also contributed a great deal. The Hungarian material was lent by the Hungarian National Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, as well as the Museum of Arts and Crafts, the National Széchényi Library, and the National Archives. The Hungarian contribution to the catalogue raisonné was also far from insignificant. Two hundred and fifty-seven items were discussed in its four hundred pages. The editorial board was headed by J. Bruyn, Professor Emeritus of the University of Amsterdam, with W. P. Blockmans, Professor of Medieval Literature at the University of Leiden, and S. H. Levie, Director Emeritus of the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum as members. The lion's share of the work was done by the historian Jacqueline Kerkhoff, who had written her 1989 Nijmegen doctoral dissertation on Mary of Hungary, and Bob van den Boogert, who is on the staff of the Art History Department at the University of Amsterdam.

The Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent of Utrecht, which in 1991 had shown early Netherlandish art from Hungarian

Berhard Strigel: (c.1465–1528): Portrait of Louis II as an Infant, *ca 1515/1516. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.*

museums, on this occasion concentrated on Mary of Hungary's historical importance, showing many a masterpiece to this purpose. It was the duty of the 's-Hertogenbosch Museum—Hieronymus Bosch's home town—to present the Queen as a patron of the arts who did much for the reception of Renaissance art. Needless to say, it was impossible to even attempt to fully cover the latter subject.

1 ■ *Kunst um 1492. Hispania-Austria. Die Katholischen Könige, Maximilian I und die Anfänge der Casa de Austria in Spanien.* Toledo–Schloss Ambras (Innsbruck), 1992. (Art around 1492. Hispania–Austria. The Catholic Kings, Maximilian I and the Beginnings of the House of Austria in Spain. Toledo–Ambras Palace (Innsbruck), 1992).

Our times have shown great interest in the 16th century and its art. Another example of a similar display was the 1992 "Hispania–Austria" exhibition in Toledo and Schloss Ambras in Austria.[1] Just as in the exhibitions in the Netherlands, great works of art served as illustrations to history. The portraits of Queen Mary and of her family on their own, extending as they do from the Late Gothic to the Late Renaissance, were a complete exhibition in themselves. A special trouvaille at Toledo and Schloss Ambras was the portrait of Archduchess Mary at the age of fourteen in a huge hat and magnificent dress, painted by Hans Maler in Innsbruck in 1520. It is now owned by the Society of Antiquaries in London.

At Utrecht it was confronted for the first time by its companion piece, that of Princess Anna, the 16-year-old daughter of King Wladislaw II of Hungary, the other bride in the arranged double marriage, at that time already engaged to the Archduke Ferdinand. This is a splendid example of a female double portrait, a rare art form.

Mária Szenczi

Flemish or German painter, second quarter of the 16th century: Posthumous Portrait of Louis II of Hungary. *Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts.*

Hans Maler (1480/90–1529): Portrait of Queen Anne of Hungary. *Private collection.*

Hans Krell painted Mary (today in Bamberg) in 1524, which formed a diptych with the picture, a portrait of King Louis II, today in the Brussels Royal Art Museum. He looks thin, suggesting great spiritual refinement, not at all as the pudgy, blue-eyed boy of Strigel's portrait from 1515, today in Vienna.

One of the finest pieces in the exhibition, a refined portrait of the young widowed Hungarian Queen by the anonymous Brussels court painter called the Master of the Magdalen Legend, was lent by the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. As mentioned earlier, Mary wore her widow's weeds to the end of her life, they became an essential element of her iconography. Her other portrait, also in Budapest, shows the widowed Queen a few years later. A coloured woodcut by Cornelis Anthonis

Hans Maler (1480/90–1529): Portrait of Queen Mary of Hungary, *1520. London, Society of Antiquaries.*

portrays the ascetically clad but very determined Regent. The small portrait medallion from the Amsterdam Rijskmuseum is a reminder of a lost portrait of the elderly Queen which Titian painted in 1548. A larger 16th century copy of the lost Titian was lent by the Paris Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

The breathtaking highlight at the Utrecht exhibition was the full-length and life-size bronze statue from Madrid, portraying the aged Queen. She commissioned the work in 1553, when she was forty-eight, from Leone Leoni, an Italian sculptor working in the Brussels court, and Leoni's son completed it in 1556, when Mary was 51. The statue survived with its original patina, an intact work of rare beauty. This was a true *imago* amongst the painted portraits: a broken, aged woman, slightly humpbacked, and with tired hands.

Naturally, there was more to the two exhibitions than splendid portraits and historical documents. Calligraphy and seals turn many 16th century documents into works of art. The show of heraldry, the letters patent from the Hungarian National Archives at an earlier exhibition in Schallaburg in Austria[2] had already convinced one and all that art historians neglect them at their peril. The most important heraldic items on display were two tapestries with the coat of arms of Margaret of Austria, the work of Henri van Lack. Both are from the Budapest Museum of Arts and Crafts, here shown in surroundings worthy of them.

The works of art in the two exhibitions could also be described as a review of the Flemish Renaissance. One of the earliest women artists, Catharina van Hemessen, was a lady in waiting to Mary of Hungary, and her husband was a court musician. They both accompanied her to Spain. Catharina van Hemessen's painting of a *Young Girl Playing the Clavichord* was shown with important documents of court music.

Jacques Dubroeucq, the greatest Renaissance sculptor in the Netherlands, whose 1535 design for the rood screen of Saint Waltrudis in Mons is a major work of Flemish art, combined the architecture of

Unknown Flemish master: The Great Hall at Binche, *1549. Coloured drawing, Brussels, Royal Library Albert I.*

2 ■ *Matthias Corvinus und die Renaissance in Ungarn 1458–1541.* (Matthias Corvinus and the Renaissance in Hungary 1458–1541).

Master of the Magdalen Legend (active at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century): The Widowed Queen Mary of Hungary around 1530. *Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts.*

Mária Szenczi

Roman triumphal arch and the late Franco-Flemish Gothic in a manner unique in his age. No wonder Mary asked him to design and ornament two of her chateaux, at Binche and Mariemont. Binche was once the most important Renaissance building in the Netherlands. Its fate recalls that of King Matthias' Buda residence in that it too was totally demolished. In 1554 Francis I of France's soldiers reduced it to rubble, as well as setting fire to Mariemont. Some of Binche's treasures have survived; the Prado treasures, Rogier van der Weyden's *Deposition from the Cross*. The frescos of the Great Hall were painted by Michiel Coxcie. Binche also had the Titians commissioned by the Queen, along with Pieter Coecke van Aelst's tapestry of the Seven Deadly Sins, as well as the busts of emperors made of Roman alabaster of the Great Hall. Dubroeucq's architectural design, including the monumental coffered vaults of which even the decorations can be identified, is only documented in a

coloured drawing. Beside figures of a Renaissance masked ball, the Habsburg family, Eleonore, Charles V, Queen Mary, and the Young Philip are sitting under a canopy. Another drawing has survived, showing another hall at Binche, where figures symbolising the planets were painted on the ceiling; a cunning mechanism below it enchanted one and all by taking the laid tables up or down. The programme of the decorations at Binche was obviously the exaltation of Habsburg fame. Ceilings decorated with motifs taken from astronomy were made all the way from Italy to Esztergom, where the palace of Archbishop János Vitéz boasted one. Joseph Duverger, the art historian drew attention to the fact that Mary's patronage of the arts in the Netherlands was the very moment of the transplanting of the Renaissance style. It is very likely that not only her humanist education and the years spent at her aunt's court in Malines, but also her time in Buda helped to shape her taste, prompting her to favour the new style. Her time at Buda may have been short, but those were the happiest and most receptive years of her youth. Time was unable to efface the memory of her husband and the same was surely true of the royal residences Buda, Visegrád, and Esztergom. It is now up to Hungarian art historians to trace connections that may have existed.

Though it may sound paradoxical, the Dutch exhibition first articulated the fact that it was indeed due to Mary of Hungary that the mature Renaissance style was accepted in Flanders. Tapestries were her favourite art, but she also commissioned paintings by Titian and the best of the so-called Romanist painters like Barend van Orley and Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen also worked for her. Michiel Coxcie, *painctre de la Royne*, she liked best, and she took his Michelangelesque *David Defeats Goliath*, which is now in the Escorial, to Spain with her, as she had taken King Matthias's, 1485 Missal from Buda (today in Brussels). Nor did she neglect the great Netherlands masters of the previous century. At one time she owned Jan van Eyck's double portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife, today in the London National Gallery. The choice of Mary, the Dowager Queen of Hungary, that great patron of Renaissance art, as one of the symbols of a Europe in the process of unification was justified not only by her name but also by her wisdom and the steadfastness of her behaviour and attitude as a human being. ❧

Júlia Szabó

László Moholy-Nagy's Postcards from the Front

Self-Portrait *(Myself). 1917.*

It was in the last century that the portrayal of ordinary life in the simple, direct language of the drawing or the sketch became a prime concern of painters. The events of the Napoleonic Wars and the succeeding revolutions were recorded in Biedermeier drawings and watercolours. Travel experiences, ordinary days in Italy, Greece and the Holy Land were captured in Romantic drawings and then by photographs. Daily life as well as major historical events were, of course, more frequently depicted by Realist artists, while the favoured topics of the Impressionists were the flurry and pulsation of busy urban life, trees swaying in the wind, and the lights of the evening, often represented quite brilliantly even without colours, and sometimes by the

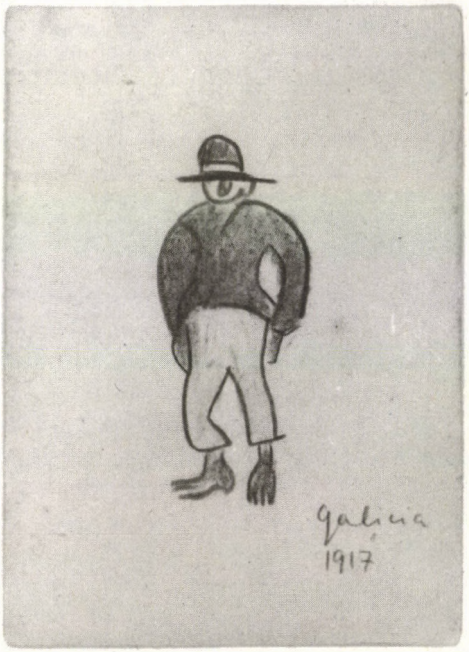
Great War, and landed on the front himself, he found life, expansive and rich up to then, suddenly determined by outside forces and severely limited. It seemed he would live a soldiers's life for a long time, and the only acceptable way out would be some kind of light wound. In the eastern and southern theatres of war he saw the most different landscapes, strange peoples and unfamiliar lifestyles at front lines which, by that time, had already reached a certain stage of technological development: with in front of, or behind, scenes of telephone wires and other symbols of civilization. The battles, the hope of victory, the premonition of defeat existed only as vague feelings in the minds of the enlisted men, and when the grim reality made its presence felt, few were able to cope with recording it in images. Instead, there were theatre and

use of subtle colouring, in watercolours, tempera, or pen and wash drawings.

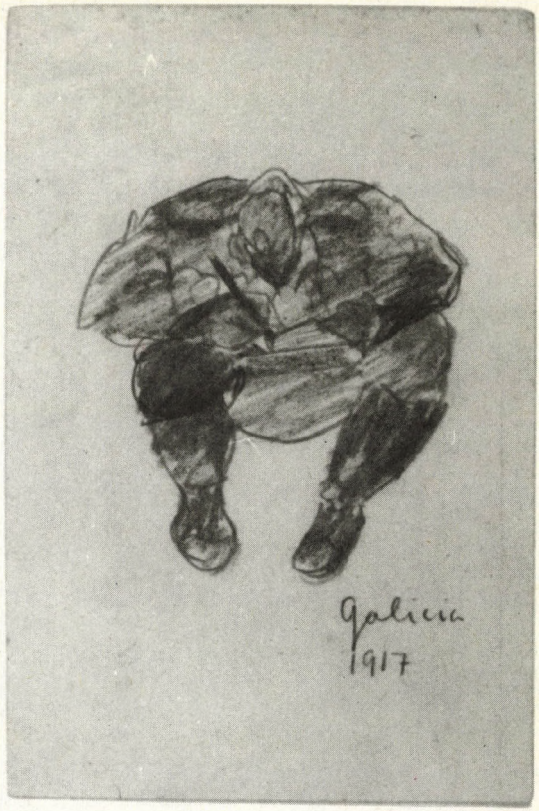
The great leap around the turn of the century toward the avant-garde only involved certain smaller groups, and even their members had covered the road leading from Realism to Impressionism before turning toward more abstract forms of expression.

As a student interested in literature and poetry, László Moholy-Nagy met and befriended Iván Hevesy, a critic, who read his free-verse poems, and showed little surprise when shortly afterwards, around 1913–1914, his friend began to draw cartoon-like portrait sketches in coffeehouses and in the streets.

Like many of his contemporaries, when Moholy-Nagy saw the outbreak of the



cabaret shows behind the line, field hospitals filling the role of social clubs as well as coffeehouses in every godforsaken little place. The single form of contact with the people at home was a few square centimetres of paper on field postcards (made from tree barks in needier times.) Mail was censored, which meant that complaints, swear-words or anti-war phrases rarely made it home at all. That may have been one of the reasons why so may people made drawings, unskilled amateurs, highly skilled and aspiring beginners alike, and they often coloured their drawn messages. Drawings were included in letters, accompanying private or secret messages to friends and relatives, or instead of them, and were sent to editorial offices (those by József Egry, for instance). The majority of these drawings were mildly impressionistic—after four decades, Impressionism had taken root in Hungary.

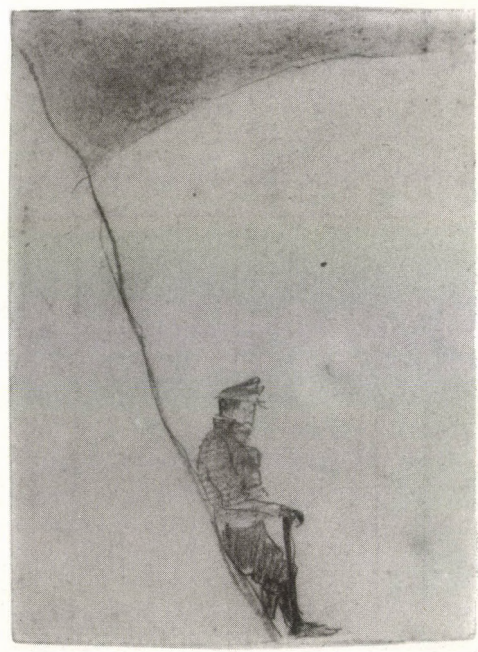


The sense of history, the feeling for the historical moment was traditionally very strong in Hungarian artists. Among Moholy-Nagy's contemporaries, this is most apparent in the drawings of József Ripp-Rónai, János Vaszary, József Egry and the young Gyula Derkovits. There are fewer symbols and more expressiveness (as in the wartime postcards of József Nemes Lampérth and in György Ruttkay's ink drawings sent to fellow-artist and poet Lajos Kassák). Realism, tinted with Impressionism, can be seen in László Mednyánszky's dramatic war images, which develop their subject from pencil drawing to oil painting.

During the war years László Moholy-Nagy probably made hundreds of drawings

many exhibitions around 1913 in Budapest, nevertheless he was noone's follower. His drawings are characterized not by any search for technique but by light, self-assured draughtsmanship. It was during these four years that he became a visual artist, one who fills the paper in an economical manner, a draughtsman capable of producing an image perfectly characterizing its subject with a single line. In that manner he recorded every major scene of the war in the theatre of war where he fought, in Galicia and Italy. ❧

on postcards, which he sent to Iván Hevesy and others. His portrayal of the episodes and actors of the war is cooler and more rational than those of his contemporaries mentioned here. He drew elegantly, with a kind of detachment, even though he had not then studied in any drawing school as yet. He must have seen



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Nicholas T. Parsons

An Inside Story of Outsiders

László Kósa (Ed.): *Die Ungarn: ihre Geschichte und Kultur* (The Hungarians: Their History and Culture. A Handbook of Hungarian Studies). Translated into German by Albrecht Friedrich. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994. 500 pp. with 32 pp. of colour and black and white illustrations.

On page 430 of this industriously compiled and in many ways estimable volume, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák quotes a reiterated plea of the writer Mihály Babits, namely that Hungarians should be induced to "look at themselves simultaneously from within and from without". The remark is not a bad starting point, both for considering some general aspects of Hungarian historiography through the eyes of a foreign student, as also for examining particular aspects of the rather ambitious undertaking under review. Babits's remark was made in the context of an assessment of the reformer, Count István Széchenyi, dubbed "the greatest Hungarian" by Kossuth, his main political rival; it touches an ever-exposed nerve and is liable (if we are not careful) to pitch us prematurely into the maelstrom of Hungarian complexities, of *kuruc* and *labanc*, of the Széchenyi vision versus the Kossuth choice, of *A kelet népe* (The People of the East) versus western and/or cosmopolitan culture, of Catholics versus Protestants, chauvinists versus patriots, the land versus the city, of seductive *délibáb* (fata morgana) versus louring *nemzethalál* (death of the nation), and so on and so forth. These are matters that supply the oxygen (and some of the noxious gases) at or around a bourne from which few travellers return unscathed.

In his introduction the editor describes the book's five chronological studies as explicating a "linguistic-cultural" unity, one, however, that in the nature of things is different from that of (for example) the linguistic homogeny of a German-speaking world encompassing many different states. On the other hand, it is conceded that the "ethnic-linguistic" principle is infrequently applicable ("is not even in every case necessary") for the period up to the 19th century, not least because it was an attitude largely alien to the official culture of the educated classes.

The matter of the book—an historical study of the Hungarian language, a condensed (largely political) history of Hungary, a two-part chronological account of literature and the arts, and a section on ethnography and folklore—is subsumed under the umbrella term "Hungarologie" (*Magyarságtudomány*). You will look in vain for this term in the two-volume Langenscheidt, but then you would also

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look in vain for "Germanologie", perhaps because of the differing roles of Hungarian and German linguistic cultures already mentioned. The distinction drawn between the multi-national state (where the language of the state-forming group was often spoken by a minority of the people) and a multiplicity of states sharing a (more or less) common language, is no doubt a useful one; the term "Hungarologie" draws attention to it. Any unease that term provokes is due less to the incense of special pleading it may seem to exude, than to scepticism as to whether it is really needed. At any rate it does not yet seem to have established itself in English, the Magay and Kiss Hungarian–English dictionary sensibly rendering *Magyarságtudomány* as "Hungarian Studies".

The editor defines "Hungarologie" as a "possible [*sic*] interdisciplinary form of the branch of knowledge dealing with Hungarian language, culture, history and society". He further identifies three versions of *Hungarologie*: as represented in the present state of Hungary, as pursued amongst the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries, and as it occurs in lands further afield. Indisputably the umbilical cord to Hungarian culture shared by these three categories of its students is the language itself and for this reason, as the editor puts it, "the book has a linguistic-cultural focus" whose material is "strongly determined by the past". He adds (a shade defensively) that the book is not concerned "to lay emphasis on the Hungarian national character [and] the distinctive ethnic features [of the Hungarians]"—functions apparently imputed by many to the practice of Hungarologie—but rather to present the many-sided historical and cultural "*Eingebettetsein*" (embeddedness) of the *Ungartum* (literally: "Hungarianness") lying in the geographical centre of Europe". The locative phrase is something of a hostage to fortune in view of the fact that nobody can decide exactly where the boundaries of Central Europe actually lie, although I am told that geographers like to tease historians by locating the centre of the continent at Minsk. Perhaps it is also noteworthy that the translator (whose rendering seems admirably workmanlike throughout in respect of the clarity of his German) has here had to resort to a coinage in order to suggest that feeling of being a distinguishing and distinctive part of the Central European furniture that the author evidently wishes to stress. At the same time, the reference to "*Ungartym*" (*Magyarság*)—another expression which, like *Deutschtum*, resists adequate translation into English)*—would seem to thin down the distinction insisted upon earlier between this work and those that accentuate national characteristics. For this

* ■ "*Deutschtum*" of course implies a synthesis of race, culture and language in which race tends to have the upper hand. Ludwig of Bavaria's Valhalla at Regensburg is a realized example of it, generously including busts of the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred, Maria Theresia and Mozart (but not Heinrich Heine who had allowed himself some satirical remarks about Ludwig and his hall of heroes). All those represented are there by virtue of their perceived membership of the Germanic family of nations. The recent erection of a bust to Albert Einstein reverses the Nazis' attempt to keep their targeted categories out of German civilization, the concern now being to keep such categories in. Many of the most venerable exhibits in a Magyar Valhalla, were one to be created, would honour persons who were not of Magyar origin and in some cases did not speak the Magyar tongue. The list includes János Hunyadi (of Romanian origin), Sándor Petőfi (whose parents were Slovak peasants) and a fair sprinkling of Poles, Italians, Jews and Germans.

reader at least, the apparent ambiguity lurking behind these remarks has an impact (not necessarily deleterious) on the text, of which more later. Meanwhile he is left pondering as to whether we are dealing here with the view (espoused by Szekfű, Babits and others) that *Ungartum* is an *inclusive* historical phenomenon, arising in the multi-national realm of King Stephen and his successors, or with something more *exclusive*, closely tied to the Hungarian language per se.

The importance of defining one's terms of reference with care when writing about matters Hungarian (and Central European) is something that students can easily learn the hard way, should they not have the present book to guide them. Much (perhaps too much) has been made of multiple and/or marginal identities in the countries of the region; moreover innocent inquirers after truth are also faced with a process, not exclusive to the area, but rather prevalent here, whereby nations invent or re-invent themselves at crucial junctures of their development, a sort of retroactive accumulation of national consciousness. A good deal of the cult of *Ungartum* that a modern tourist may typically be presented with—conveniently, if not entirely fairly, characterized as the kitsch of *csikós* and *csárdás*—may be traced back to the 19th century's discovery of the marketing potential of souvenir culture (a potential exploited, for example, at the Millennium Celebrations of 1896).

The concentration on linguistic continuity—some 75 per cent of the book is primarily concerned with language and literary expression—rightly and naturally leads to an accumulative portrait of Hungarians both as an ethnic group and as a state-forming caste; to a portrait also (even if this was not the authors' stated intention) of Hungarian identity in all its contradictory waywardness, nobility and capacity for self-injury.

At this point it is worth pausing to consider what audience the editors had in mind for the type of information on offer, and whether the manner in which it is presented is likely to achieve or defeat the aims the individual authors have set themselves.

The Hungarian title *(A magyarságtudomány kézikönyve)* would seem to suggest (with the word *kézikönyv,* "handbook") that the intention was to produce a text for reference or a source-book, and this impression is reinforced by the editor's expressed hope that the work will be of practical assistance to high school and university students, including those of non-Hungarian origin. On the other hand, the material is cast in narrative form, an especially graceful narrative in the case of the contribution by András Gergely, who has achieved the near-impossible task of giving a judicious overview of Hungarian history from the ethnogenesis of the Hungarian people (estimated to be in the palaeolithic period) to the first local elections (1990) after the Antall government came to power. The entire sweep of Hungarian events is reduced to 114 pages, and it is a tribute to its author that the reader seldom feels any sense of strain in the compression of the material; nor does the text degenerate into a list of names and dates. The excellence of this part of the book rather throws into relief the problems faced by some of the other authors. The two sections on "Literature and the Arts" by Péter Kőszeghy (from the beginnings to the end of the 17th century) and Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (from the 18th century to the present) comprise very nearly half the text. Nevertheless they concentrate (as the editor warned us they would) overwhelmingly on the written word, with small sections on architecture, music and the arts (mostly painting) sandwiched at intervals into the chronological analysis. Perhaps with the student audi-

ence in mind, a huge number of authors and their works have been conscientiously listed. Too conscientiously, in fact, for one is bound to ask what instructional purpose can usefully be served if the narrative landscape is periodically blotted out in a blizzard of names and dates. An example taken at random from Köszeghy's text (pp. 264-266) may serve to illustrate the problem: he has some illuminating remarks about the increasing profanity of the literary texts by the sixteenth century preacher Péter Bornemisza and moves on to a thorough, if rather dry, analysis of the achievement of the great bible translator (1590), Gáspár Károli. In between, in five short paragraphs, we have to hear about a dozen other contemporaries. Obviously references of this density are better represented as entries in a biographical lexicon than in the form they appear here.

A related tendency to name-listing on this scale is the style-mongering that occasionally disfigures Szegedy-Maszák's otherwise thought-provoking and stimulating contribution. For example, the description of Gyula Krúdy as "the most important writer of the Hungarian Jugendstil", (also "a developer of the novel form" and "one of the most important Hungarian novelists of the 20th century") is little more than wind, even if you accept (as I do not) that the application of the term "art nouveau/Jugendstil" to literature is in any way helpful. Lóránt Czigány, whose *Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* has set a formidable standard by which Hungarian literary history may be judged, supplies the sort of insight required when he speaks of Krúdy anticipating the "stream of consciousness" technique characteristic of the work of Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

The style-mongering tendency is even more pronounced when the author leaves home ground and tackles art and architecture. He gives the painter Csontváry due recognition, but the nature of the latter's individual genius (surely not to be dissociated from a quasi-mystical perception of Hungarian identity) entirely eludes him. Thus we are told that *Sunset in the Bay of Naples* has affinities with Jugendstil, *The Wailing Wall* is linked up with Expressionism, and the last works are said to be harbingers of Surrealism. Perhaps this sort of thing is useful for examination answers, but if so, it is the exams that need to be questioned.

On the other hand, the balance that needs to be struck between the formal requirements of learning and the need to supply a readable overview with thought-provoking insights is always extremely hard to achieve; there certainly are places where the authors miraculously do achieve it, managing to be both informative and stimulating.

For example, Szegedy-Maszák's piece (18th century to the present day) will doubtless be a rich source for contemporary controversy, principally because the author deals fascinatingly with cultural politics versus political culture. The 18th century is a useful time-hinge, being the period (as Kósa points out in The Hungarians in the World) when the Carpathian Basin saw the formation of national groupings that have not changed greatly since (population exchanges and attempted genocide excepted). The strength of Szegedy-Maszák's cultural survey of three centuries lies in the author's willingness to take time off from gazetting stylistic developments to sketch in the social, demographic, religious, and political circumstances that gave rise to them. This enables the reader to comprehend the relative backwardness of 18th century Hungary in terms of multiple underlying factors—lingering feudalism, slow population growth, the vagaries of religious control in education, and so on. Particularly stimu-

lating is the discussion of the influence of the Enlightenment on the cult of national character, whether constructive (as with Montesqieu's *L'esprit des lois*, which advocated tailoring the administration of states to suit their individual cultures) or arguably disastrous (as in the case of Herder's notorious "prophecy" that the Hungarians would be absorbed in the pullulating mass of surrounding Slavs, Germans, Wallachians—"in centuries to come one will perhaps no longer find their language"). Hungarian patriotism thus exhibited a contradictory response to the Enlightenment as a whole; the seeds of contradiction lay in its ultimately doomed attempt to exploit ideas (mostly imported from France) that seemed to respect the integrity of the Hungarian national ideal, while simultaneously rejecting many of the enlightened ordinances of Habsburg rule that seemed to do the opposite.

The history of Hungary is dogged by such clashes of irreconcilables (human and abstract), which seem to change their outer complexion from age to age, but not their essential nature. They crop up frequently in Szegedy-Maszák's text, as for example in this observation on p. 358: "The Hungarian language was simultaneously an advantage and a disadvantage for scholarship and science. Through it the fruits of learning could reach a wider public and this in turn obliged the intelligentsia in general to concentrate more on the practical, and to make their work popularly accessible and transmittable; on the other hand the isolation of the Hungarian language increased the disadvantages of the exiguous scholarly activity in the country—scholars could not count on international recognition of their work." Two centuries after the period under discussion, Gyula Illyés was to write: "the Hungarian's mother-tongue is at the same time our softest cradle and our most solid coffin"—*plus ça change*.

In dealing with Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), perhaps the most celebrated victim of irreconcilable Hungarian contradictions, Szegedy-Maszák points out how the relationship between Liberalism and Romanticism is crucial to the culture of Hungary in the first half of the 19th century. In Széchenyi himself we can perceive their dual influence, in that the Benthamite utilitarianism, that characterized the active man who bullied his fellow-countrymen to get things done, is tempered by a "romantic variation of liberalism", impregnated with moral responsibility.

In the national question Széchenyi reacted to the pressures of his age and political environment, articulating an ambivalence and/or frustration when dealing with it that was to recur in different ways up to the present. His position veers from the non-discriminatory insistence that every language created its own world and every nation had the potential for a culture which only she was called upon to develop (*Hunnia*), to a Cartesian impatience with the imperfections of language; in his journal he pondered whether it might not profitably be replaced by a system of numbers covering all concepts, so that the written word could be mathematically fixed for eternity. (The journal itself was of course written in three languages, with cross-references to others.)

After Szegedy-Maszák's masterly treatment of these and other matters that characterized Hungarian society and culture up to Dualism, it comes as rather a disappointment to read his account of the second half of the 19th century, and especially of Historicism, with which he seems to be notably out of sympathy. An inauspicious beginning is made with his treatment of the great novelist, Mór Jókai (1825–1904). The latter is knocked down with a stale repetition of charges that are surely due for re-

assessment, the principal one being that his works are mere tableaux welded onto implausible and didactically planned plots. Such a dismissal fails to explain what needs to be explained, namely why his works have endured (Dr. Johnson's acid test of quality) and are still quite widely read. Again the comparison with Czigány's *Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* is tempting, for there we are given a rich analysis of Jókai's "national romanticism" and at least some clues as to exactly why Jókai's brand of escapism was so popular abroad, as well as in Hungary. Szegedy-Maszák mentions the "simple confrontation between good and evil" in the novels and it might have been worth noting, in the context of *Ungartum*, that Jókai was the product of a strict Calvinist upbringing. Perhaps that has something to do not only with the stark dualism of his created world but also with his amazing capacity for work, even if the latter was also given artificial stimulus by a fierce wife who locked him into his study. (Jókai's collected works make up more than a hundred volumes.)

Similarly, the painter Bertalan Székely (whose technical excellence is grudgingly conceded) is tarred with much the same brush as Jókai; together with contemporary painters of Historicism, he is tepidly described as "wanting to make national history vivid and subordinating picture composition to didactic aims". This is virtually to imply that history paintings are no more than picturesque trifles or even kitsch, yet the genre surely deserves a more generous approach. The accusations that these painters were indifferent to the "artistic tasks" of the age (whatever that may mean) and that they did not take as their measure the best old masters (neither did some painters we regard as great) may once have been the received wisdom, but I suspect the upcoming shows of Historicism will prompt a re-think.

Inadequacy seems to turn to prejudice when the author turns to architecture and Miklós Ybl, who, we are told with Loosian asperity, "built Renaissance palaces when commissioned to produce bourgeois apartment blocks, because he could only work to one design [*sic*]." Readers are ill-served by such pseudo-insights, not only because of their inaccuracy, but because such an account fails to locate a very gifted architect in the context of an age when Historicism was the norm throughout European architecture. Ybl's best works, the fruits of apprenticeship abroad as well as in Hungary, may stand comparison with those of Theophil Hansen and Charles Garnier; here he is made to seem merely pretentious, provincial and inept.

In Szegedy-Maszák's final chapters (From the Crisis of Dualism to the Revolutions—1890–1919, The Culture of the "Three Hungaries"—1919–1944, and A Concise Overview of the Recent Past (from 1945) his strengths as an analyst of culture in its relationship to political developments are again on display. Indeed, these chapters ably provide the component of social history that András Gergely cannot accommodate in his formal political history. Vital information is supplied on the evolution and gradual (or partial) secularisation of education, the assimilation of Jews, and the hesitant advance of female emancipation; (incidentally, why should Margit Kaffka—1880–1918—the first significant Hungarian female writer of fiction, be ignored when dozens of near-nonentities are paraded for inspection?) He shows how the increasing pressures of nationalism that led to the collapse of the Dual Monarchy, the First World War, the dismemberment of ancient Hungary, and finally, participation in the Second World War, are made manifest in the continual search by writers and intellectuals for a definition (or redefinition) of *Ungartum*,

and its role in the world. Here we return to an ancient dichotomy, the opposed branches of which had simply evolved to reflect (or react against) contemporary political realities. The broad distinction remains, however: that between liberally-oriented patriotism inherently respectful of the diversity of cultures on the one hand, and on the other what has been described in a different context as "conservative state-sponsored nationalism".

The leading interpreters of this political and psychological crisis of identity—Endre Ady in poetry, Oszkár Jászi in political thought, Mihály Babits in culture—are mostly well-known to students of modern Hungary. The author deserves our thanks, however, for his illuminating treatment of the 1920s and 1930s, when numerous defensively written tracts of a "national Christian" character appeared. Typically these promoted the theme of the Hungarian civilizing mission; but there were also thoughtful and ruminative works by writers like Gyula Szekfű, Dezső Kosztolányi, and László Németh. The latter two broadly aligned themselves with Széchenyi's romantic vision of the uniqueness of each nation's (potential) cultural contribution; Kosztolányi rooted this uniqueness for Hungary in the Hungarian language, which he treats as indicant of national character. Unlike György Lukács, Hungary's most spectacular example of the *trahison des clercs*, these writers did not take refuge in a self-verifying system of ideology. Nevertheless, their writings tend to betray either the wishful thinking of Németh's *külön magyar út* ("special Hungarian way"), which always seemed to involve turning the clock back instead of facing up to future realities; or, alternatively, they applied themselves to the search for an external guarantor of the integrity of *Ungartum*, notwithstanding the almost universally unhappy experiences their forefathers had had with such attempts. Particularly interesting in this respect is the analysis of *Three Generations* (1920), a much-discussed work by the historian Gyula Szekfű, a conservative who nevertheless challenged the shibboleths of narrow nationalistic historiography, to the discombobulation of the latter's adherents. In the Széchenyi tradition, Szekfű saw Hungary as belonging with the developed, modern states of Western Europe, and was also a paid-up member of what George Orwell calls the "change of heart" school (as opposed to the proponents of violent change, in which category he placed Kossuth). Not unrealistically, his initial choice of guarantor fell on Germany, but his vision of Hungary playing a role in a "Christian-Germanic cultural community" was destroyed by Nazi racism; turning away from the Germans, he ended up as Hungary's first ambassador to Moscow after 1945. Szekfű was a broken man in his last years, his honour intact but his vision for Hungary destroyed by geo-political realities.

Szegedy-Maszák's fascinating discussion of Szekfű is somewhat lengthy, rightly so in my opinion, because so many of the enduring questions about the identity and historical role of the Hungarians are crystallized in Szekfű's work. How relevant they remain may be seen from some of the remarks made by Gyula Horn in a recent interview with Paul Lendvai for Austrian television. The Prime Minister designate (as he then was) observed that the country was now in a situation it had rarely enjoyed, that of not being under the direct political dominance of a neighbouring power. Yet hesitancy and economic self-interest in the West, coupled with the louring possibility of a full dress rehearsal for Armageddon to the east, are brutal reminders of the refractory nature of Hungary's unfinished business.

No reviewer feels he has earned his crust unless he signs off with a few formal quibbles. Most of mine have been aired already, but I would add that Antonio Bonfini can hardly have entered the service of Matthias Corvinus in 1586 if, as the author claims, he had already died in 1503. Secondly, the editors (I presume) have chosen to locate a celebrated painters' colony in Transylvania at a place called "Neustadt"; but it makes no sense to mystify readers in this way when a town associated with a whole school of painting (far too cursorily treated here, by the way) is always known by its Hungarian name of Nagybánya. (On the other hand, alert readers will find all three names—German, Romanian and Hungarian—listed in a different context on the previous page). Lastly, and far more seriously, the usefulness of the book for student and general reader alike is drastically diminished by the absence of an index. Until Hungarian publishers have the grace to supply all translations of textbooks and scholarly works with indexes, the contempt in which they obviously hold the potential readers of their publications is likely to be heartily reciprocated. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Life's Banalities

Mihály Kornis: *Napkönyv* (Sunbook). Pesti Szalon, 1994, 196 pp. • György Spiró: *T-boy*. Ab Ovo, 1994, 172 pp. • Balázs Györe: *Mindenki keresse a saját halálát* (Let Everyone Look for His Own Death). Cserépfalvi, 1993, 147 pp.

Mihály Kornis, the author of several well-received plays and books of fiction and non-fiction, is of the same age as the overthrown communist regime in Hungary. His new book *Napkönyv* (Sunbook), highly personal in tone, reveals that he was never as miserable and desperate during the forty years of that communism as he was during the four years which followed its demise. *Sunbook* is inspired by a need to put into words his state of mind in a kind of diary, a reflection on the early 1990s. Yet it is far from being a normal diary as such: Kornis records his days while turning his eye on the Sun, both in a literal and figurative sense. (*Nap* means both "day" and sun" in Hungarian.) By the Sun, he means a kind of constancy, or indeed eternity. His personal present and past are set in a mythical or spiritual perspective, introspection is transformed into a search for God and repentance, and the portrayal of the present is transformed into an apocalyptic vision. This is an internal monologue of a complex texture, blending a great range of themes and tones, feverishly and luxuriously, occasionally overflowing to profane prayer or litany.

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is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

The central motif of the first part, "Invocation", is death and the graveyard. Kornis conjures up his dead at their graves in the Budapest Jewish cemetery. A maladjusted man and writer calls on his ancestors, without really knowing why. Though the visitor in the book is called Tábor, Kornis openly speaks of himself and his family. Now over forty, he feels his life has turned out to be a failure. Nothing has come of his youthful dreams; indeed, looking back from maturity, youth seems a dream, a paradise lost. Kornis's distracted monologue is one of complaint, reckoning and self-reproach. A recurring theme is sterility, the Great Book that has been postponed and is already overdue. Kornis obviously intends this *Sunbook* (which is supposed to be continued later) to fulfil a promise he once made to himself, to justify his existence to himself (and perhaps to his God). Naturally, he is fully aware of the fact that such books are no longer needed by anyone.

The subtitle is "The hero of our story". The hero of Kornis's story (in this supposedly first volume) is none other than himself, placed in that somewhat ironical perspective the subtitle suggests. Standing before the slowly disappearing graves of his parents and grandparents, the hero summons up his memories of them, engages in dialogue with them, and ritually identifies

himself with them by eating the cemetery soil. A defiantly blasphemous and narcissistic monologue, verbally glittering, sometimes in the form of *vers libre* and flowing associations, reflections and historical mosaics, sets out the basic epic situation of the book. On the one hand, there is the writer who is chronically blocked yet, as the pages show, is finally and triumphantly writing, though not liberated from his doubts, fears, failures, and agonies; on the other, there are his relatives, long gone characters from the Jewish petty bourgeoisie of Budapest, whom memory has transfigured into victims, as representatives of the past and the present, our increasingly barbarous nineties.

The second part, "Daytime", concerns the writer's present in Budapest, the "savour" of his life. It is about the city, the streets and houses where he once lived and walked, and which now, when he revisits them, flood him with childhood memories. It is about a "heat wave", which with its scorching, blinding heat and "cadaverous colour" conjures up horrid visions, apocalyptic visions of the godlessness of the nineties, of wickedness, cruelty, chaotic sell-out, diabolic people, and senseless brutality. The desolate Budapest of the 1950s and his childhood radiate an idyllic and nostalgic mood; all the embittered, spent adult sees are threatening, sinister signs, and this subjective view obstinately ignores some of the historical facts.

"Daytime" centres around the rescue of a dog, which develops into a parable and the climax of the whole book, presented with amazing virtuosity. It is about a "Somebody", a ridiculously unimportant being, a puppy which has fallen into a roadside ditch and has been howling there for days, left to itself, a piece of matted grime. The writer "treacherously" flees from its reproachful, supplicant glance, but returns next day, like a criminal to the scene of his crime. Although he feels an urgent need to act, he is unable to do so. Almost demented, he rings up and tries to get various societies to act; after countless failures, he finally happens on a fanatic devoted to saving dogs. Both the events and their presentation are so intense, have so many conceptual and stylistic shades added, that the whole part turns into a witty, self-ironic, splendidly grotesque and hysterically funny story and a cosmic indictment tempting providence.

Sunbook is the book of a quarrel with God, now sought for, now disowned, and now found again. In his exorbitantly subjective, narcissistic language, Kornis seeks a place for his individual self, his person as a writer, a Jew and a man, his vanity and his guilt in the late 20th century. The third part, "Night", consists of a single chapter subtitled "Submersion", which develops precisely this aspect of the book. Here we have memories about himself, visions, supplications, confessions swirling together, in which the precise identity of the narrator becomes blurred: the childhood and adult selves of the writer shade into one another, and even the ancestors have a share. "The hero of our story" is no longer simply Mihály Kornis, the eminent, somewhat frustrated middle-aged writer, but all the experiences, instincts, observations, and memories that live within him.

György Spiró, three years Kornis's senior, also has a devastating opinion of the 1990s. With a considerable body of work to his name (plays, novels and volumes of stories and essays), Spiró is now mainly active as the artistic director of the repertory theatre company at Szolnok. Almost as an exercise in maintaining his literary skills, as it were, he has now published cursory "horror stories". The title, *T-boy,* is as senseless a pun as some of the stories are crazy and absurd. (T-boy" in Hungarian reads as *téboly*, which means frenzy,

bedlam.) Most of the stories in the volume—some of them in the form of scarcely disguised parables—reflect on the latest developments in Eastern Europe, or perhaps in the world. Spiró takes it almost as a fact that history is a senseless massacre and destruction, in which sooner or later everyone has to take their turn. Ruin, frenzy, catastrophe and the end lie hidden in every corner, however sheltered and secure it may seem, and slowly and methodically consume everything and everybody.

Most of the horror stories, presented in an ostentatiously plain style, seem to be events or life stories not worthy of mention; they play down even the dreadful dénouements as routine turns. The protagonist of "Antique" marries and has children late, owing to all kinds of familiar vicissitudes; by then he can no longer think of anything else but of how to save his family and his "happiness" from even greater impending catastrophes. Seemingly nothing happens, his wife does not even understand her husband's morbid dread, but finally fate emerges from within the man himself, and he wipes out his whole family. "Before he blew out his brains, it occurred to him that he ought perhaps leave behind some paper in which he would explain things, or in which he would call the attention of the UN, or some similar pathetic thing, but then he just gestured, what does it matter, it is too late, it was too late even before he was born." In "The Experiment", public servants for some unknown reason chain a number of captives to arcades in the centre of town, and then abandon them. The experiment turns out a great success, after a few days' time no one bothers about the prisoners or thinks of releasing them. They have become part of the townscape, first in tattered rags and later naked, in their own excrement, waiting perhaps to be cleared away. "Synopsis" is an ostentatiously transparent caricature of a parable, which in the frame of a prison story provides a synopsis of what, according to Spiró, has taken place here in Hungary during the first four years of the new political system. He passes a summary judgment: an absurd comedy is going on that will not change anything of importance. Several other stories are similarly improvised marginal notes to an impertinent pamphlet on the processes taking place in this region.

Some of the horror stories portray Spiró's current mood in the form of a weird irrationality. In "Rekk" a woman, taking her small child, goes abroad to meet her lover; the child disturbs their tête-à-têtes, so she drowns it. Back at home she says she has temporarily left the child abroad. Finally it turns out that she has done away with it, but since there is no corpus delicti, the case becomes more and more irksome for the police, until finally the drowned corpse itself appears at the police station. This, however, is so inexplicable that now it is the police who have it conjured away. In another story, a man is living a settled family life until suddenly he starts growing a second penis, causing complications in his marital lovemaking. So they hire a second woman for the second organ, which leads to further complications. In a refreshing contrast to the absurd story, Spiró's phrasing, all witty superiority and off-hand gesture, gives the impression that it is of no importance whatever to him to tell these trifling stories. "It would be good," he writes at the end of the last mentioned story, "if this story had a happy ending, but then life is indeed cruel, and far from having a happy ending, this story has not even an unhappy end. I think the best thing for everybody would have been if all the characters had retired to a convent."

T-boy also includes stories that are to be taken more seriously. These are of a

more personal inspiration, like "Slave Revolt", in which the narrator contemplates the razor he has inherited from his father: it linked him into a chain, against which he can rebel at most as a slave rebels against his fate. "Bridge" is inspired by a similar thought: his father, his dead first wife and the best friend living abroad are bridges which have enabled him to become enriched by new heads alongside his own head. It is ridiculous to attempt to remain his own self throughout, since one can only exist as a link in a chain.

The horror stories in *T-boy* are improvisations dashed off with easy routine. Thanks to Spiró's witty, cool and frivolous style and black humour, some of them are fairly successful. However, some of the pieces are strained and concocted. Knowing Spiró's basic point of departure, one might well ask whether the frightening prospects of this *fin de siècle* look so petty and everyday when seen by a superior outsider. Is Kornis's profound personal concern not more authentic and fascinating?

Born in 1951, Balázs Györe more or less belongs to Kornis's and Spiró's generation. So far he has been better known for his poetry, publishing his first book of fiction in 1989. A "journal novel", it is called *A 91-esen nyugodtan elalhatok* (I Can Safely Fall Asleep on the 91). This he recently followed up with *Mindenki keresse a saját halálát* (Let Everyone Look for His Own Death). The title is a quotation from *Utas és holdvilág* (The Wayfarer and Moonlight), a novel by Antal Szerb, the essayist and novelist killed in the Holocaust. One of the two long stories in Györe's new volume takes its subject from this novel. Szerb's book is about youthful dreams and a yearning for foreign parts, about friendships and passions, the deadly risks of delusions and about sobering evanescence. Györe's story has similar characters and situations. A specific fascination lies in featuring real persons under their real names. They are former friends of the writer, "who have their domicile and personality not only in these pages but lived, live and will live forever in reality as well." One of them is called János Szerb, the son of Antal Szerb's widow (though not Antal Szerb's). János was a poet and Tibetan scholar, who died young, and as presented here, his life in many respects resembled that of Tamás Ulpius, one of the characters in *The Wayfarer and Moonlight.*

The youthful days conjured up from the early 1990s took place in the first half of the 1970s. Györe relates the story of János Szerb and the circle of friends around him tautly and concisely, in the matter-of-fact manner of minute-taking, at places almost giving the impression of naivety. The story itself is made up of short sections, scenes and memories. A critic remarked: "Balázs Györe's prose expresses the weight of otherwise unnoticed motifs. He carries this out at the dictate of an implacable logic by which life devours everything—the important just as much as the seemingly less important—and as a consequence everything for a moment appears in an equally strong light. This logic is rarely evident so openly and, despite the profound emotions, so relentlessly in Hungarian fiction. Or is it perhaps possible that all profound emotions are relentless?"

Györe's main topic concerns friendship and transience. In his friendship with János Szerb and János's first wife, Gyöngyi, he experiences transience. János left the country, then committed suicide; Gyöngyi married again abroad, and comes to visit Hungary only rarely. The other story, "... *még mindig élünk*" (We Are Still Alive) is also about a friendship which dates back to university years. Here the protagonist is Szczepan, a young Pole who, after living and studying in

Hungary, has to go back to Poland and there loses the ground from under his feet. In Hungary he is a Pole, in Poland a Hungarian; the duality brings about a grave psychological crisis. Györe conjures up his character in a diary-like description of his own stays in Poland. "I considered, and still consider friendship a very serious thing," he writes in his deliberately naive and banal manner. "If I have a friend, I meet him every day. I want to see him every day. Whether or not we have any business with each other. I also meet him if we have already talked about everything. Even if we can only feel bored. We are bored together. Friendship is very boring and time-consuming. We are sitting, stay silent and are bored. This is friendship." The variation and dosage of banal statements balanced on apothecary's scales lends a singular melancholic and ironic effect to Györe's text. *Let Everyone Look for His Own Death* is a volume of fiction whose simplicity, detachment and functionalism have been measured out by the author with the sensitivity of a lyric poet. ❧

György Uhrman

In the Place of Hungaroton

By the spring of 1994, the production and release of classical records in Hungary had practically ceased. According to a gentleman from the State Property Agency, the only solution to the problems afflicting the former state-owned Hungaroton record company was liquidation, or "final accounts", if this sounds better. This dictum was a consequence of the "rapid solution" the administration initiated in cultural matters four years ago. This is all the more painful because, by the eighties, it was Hungaroton that enjoyed the best image and highest prestige in the musical world of all the similar firms in the socialist countries. From the late 1960s onwards, the company was on an unbroken rise for twenty years, establishing a good name and reputation for itself, particularly in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States. Several of its successful projects, most notably the Bartók Edition, were awarded the Grand Prix du Disque. Young collectors and music lovers now, however, know nothing of this, even through hearsay, as hardly any new Hungarian CDs are available in shops here or abroad. What had once been a workmanlike standard was by the eighties raised to the front rank by soloists like Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff, or Dezső Ránki, the cellist Miklós Perényi, the clarinettist Béla Kovács, singers like Júlia Hamari, Sylvia Sass, Ilona Tokody, József Gregor, and later Éva Marton et al., with recordings of arias as well as complete operas and oratorios. Reviewers placed the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Tátrai and the Takács Quartets among the best. The technical quality was usually of the highest standard. From the late 70s onwards, some of the Hungaroton booklets accompanying their records equalled the splendour of the old luxurious Decca booklets (for instance those for Solti's *Zauberflöte* and *Rosenkavalier*). The booklets that went with the 1981–82 centenary Bartók and Kodály recordings presented Hungaroton as a scholarly publisher of musicological works.

The economic crisis of the late 1980s did not spare the firm. Against the backdrop of a declining economy, a growing number of bad decisions were taken by the management, and their consequences could neither be warded off by the expertise or enthusiasm of most of Hungaroton's staff, nor by stretching the scope and

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for many years on the staff of Hungaroton, now reviews records for the daily Magyar Hírlap.

elbowroom of the firm, despite all the efforts to handle the crisis. The new opportunities that came with the changes naturally pointed towards independence and privatization, but at that point, in the summer of 1990, the new government chose to intervene. The blocking of a planned privatization in collaboration with EMI and the events and scandals that followed made headlines abroad as well as here. It would take many pages to tell the story in detail. Suffice it to say that what had up to then been a profitable enterprise, with good export earnings, was destroyed. Nor should it go unmentioned that the decision makers were prompted by a number of performers and composers who thought of themselves as inadequately represented on recordings. But fate plays funny tricks. Hungaroton had in fact issued most of their works (including lengthy operas)—as it did those of practically all living Hungarian composers—even though these were non-commercial propositions. Between 1990 and 1994, however, virtually not a single record appeared by contemporary Hungarian composers, including those who had been complaining earlier. Although a much broader section of the musician confraternity protested against the new ministerial and enterprise dictatorship, regardless of their political views, no notice was taken by the greater and lesser powers that be. The disastrous Hungaroton management, intriguing against each other, ended in unavoidable failure. Quite simply, these gentlemen destroyed the efforts of decades. The anguished warnings and alarmist prophecies of 1990 now look like cheerful optimism when compared with the outcome. During the 1980s, Hungaroton had issued between sixty and eighty, exceptionally a hundred, classical recordings every year. Hungaroton Classic Limited, which has undertaken to try to save the label, is planning to release 15 discs this year; some of these are archive recordings and for some the expenses are being met by the performer and possible sponsors.

Where have all the artists gone?

From its old monopoly position, Hungaroton considered it its duty to satisfy all kinds of classical music demands. Under the conditions of the hoped for competitive market, however, the mushrooming new firms would obviously have to establish more individual profiles. Quint tried its hand, with EMI backing. It soon turned out, however, that incompetence and chaos reigned in the domestic market and, with ill-considered imports, the old and new firms eliminated themselves from competition and deprived themselves of export opportunities.

So the best performers have been forced to look to record companies abroad. A number, including the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, have been successful. As in the previous decade, Zoltán Kocsis is under contract to Philips; after his earlier recordings of Bartók works for piano and orchestra, he has scored a great critical success with the first volume of pieces for solo piano, and the continuation is eagerly expected. Kocsis will soon record works by Rachmaninov, Debussy and Ravel. The conductor Ádám Fischer, who has been working abroad, is signed to record for the British label, Nimbus. He has performed Bartók programmes, and conducted several Haydn symphonies in Eisenstadt with the Austro-Hungarian Haydn Orchestra, which fosters the cultural traditions common to the two countries. László Polgár had already earlier worked with Nikolaus Harnoncourt. His Leporello in *Don Giovanni* received the highest praise of all the soloists in that recording. Andrea Rost's much acclaimed soprano would once have

had a recording programme lasting for years based on it by Hungaroton, as one of the lyrical voices of her generation. She now appears in Abbado's productions, will next be heard in a Deutsche Grammophone recording of Mahler's *Eighth*.

Naxos, reputed for high standards and low prices, has placed more Hungarian soloists and ensembles onto the international market than all other firms taken together. They singled out Jenő Jandó as their star pianist. Jandó already had a sizable Hungaroton repertoire, but Naxos commissioned him to do full cycles of the Mozart and Beethoven sonatas and concertos. He is now continuing with Schubert, Brahms and Schumann. Naxos also distributes the recordings of the Éder Quartet and the steadily improving Kodály Quartet. The latter promises to carry on the great Hungarian string quartet tradition that stretches all the way from the Léner and the Waldbauer, through the Végh and the Hungarian, to the Tátrai, the Bartók, and the Takács quartets.

The list could be continued, still, as a consequence of the decline of Hungaroton, just as many accomplished musicians scarcely have access to a studio. As to the leading Hungarian symphony orchestras, they feature under their own names or occasionally using fancy names on various foreign labels, but some of their recordings are pirated, with non-existent names then frequently imposed on them.

"When will the darkness fade?" Tamino asks in *The Magic Flute*. Well, a glimmer of hope has already appeared with the first, heartening, signs of revival.

The Budapest Festival Orchestra broke the barriers of late-socialist cultural policy through its very formation and existence. Most recently they have appeared as the publisher of their own performances, under the PONTY label. Their first undertaking, with Iván Fischer conducting, was a clear critical success. They recorded a varied and enjoyable programme of less widely known works by the younger Bachs in the Athens Megaron. Alongside the pieces of chamber music and symphonic character, (in which noted soloists appeared like Péter Szűts, Miklós Spányi, Erika Sebők, et al.), the *pièce de resistance* was the solo cantata by Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach, *Die Amerikanerin*, with the American Claron McFadden appropriately singing the solo part.

The other independent initiative has a special story all of its own.

The authentic version of *Bánk bán*

By the summer of 1993, the state record company could not afford to pay proper tribute to the memory of Ferenc Erkel, the founder of Hungarian national opera. One year earlier, Hungaroton did release an LP with Erkel's piano works, but this is related to Erkel's oeuvre in much the same way as if songs were made to stand for Chopin's oeuvre. The Hungarian recording industry—then in its infancy—made no attempt to record the foremost national opera under a nationalist regime between the wars; similarly, an administration, identifying itself with the national tradition, did not, in 1993, undertake to sponsor the recording of an authentic version of *Bánk bán*. The piece finally became the business of a firm that called itself Alpha Line (producer: Tamás Benedek). What is special about these three CDs (ALR 005-07), released in November 1993, is that no living soul today could ever have heard the best Hungarian romantic opera in this form. The same presumably holds true for previous generations as well.

One of the successes in the "authenticity" trend that has irresistibly gained ground since the 1960s, was the digital recording of an earlier Erkel opera, *Hunyadi László*

(1985, Hungaroton HCD 12581–83), in the reconstructed version by the Erkel scholar, Amadé Németh. Ever since that, the reconstruction of *Bánk bán* has been thought of as timely. The more than 130 years since the premiere in 1861 have seen many modifications, greater or lesser, to the score, in keeping with the theatrical and other requirements of the day. Erkel himself made many cuts and corrections based on experience of the performances, and during the ensuing years, there were many arbitrary alterations, by many hands. It is doubtful whether the music has ever been heard as the composer originally meant it to sound. In 1939, the Budapest Opera wanted to put an end to this with a drastic revision. The fashionable approach of the time called for modernization rather than period authenticity. True, Nándor Rékai hardly added anything to the music, but he made a great many cuts, inserting them in other scenes and had them sung by other characters. By so doing he changed, or indeed upset, the dramatic and musical balance of scenes and put characters in a different light in many places. Erkel's librettist, Béni Egressy, had a good dramatic sense but a poor flair for versification. Almost his entire text was abandoned, not only due to the obsolete vocabulary that sounded unusual and even comical to modern ears, but in particular because of bad prosody. Kálmán Nádasdy and Gusztáv Oláh, who revised the opera, went back to the splendid tragedy of the same name by József Katona, on which the libretto had been based, and they tried to accommodate Katona's expressive lines to the music. They made considerable changes in the scenes, the order of events and the parts. All this magnified the faults resulting from the all too many alterations ruining a once consistent and balanced structure. This was particularly evident in Acts One and Two. The condensed work undoubtedly had a glib fluency on stage, but this was achieved at the cost of disturbing the logical order and interpretability of the score. Nonetheless, this version was considered the right one from 1940 onwards. (It served as the basis for all stage productions and broadcasts, and for two recordings.)

In the 1950s, musicologists studied the original manuscript. Finally, the original version, or, more precisely, the reconstructed score, was completed and published in the late 1980s by György Bácskai, who was at the time on the staff of Hungaroton.

In the first and second acts the sections that had fallen victim to the 1939 revision have in many places been replaced: at certain points this amounts to some 60 to 100 bars. In the second half of Act Two, there are three set numbers now heard for the first time: an Ensemble, a March and the Finale. The original order of scenes, the original vocal parts and the mutilated episodes have also been restored. Erkel made good use of what he had learnt from his contemporaries, Donizetti and Verdi, but in a manner which considerably differs from Verdi's. In any event, the original structure based on *Scene Grandi* certainly justifies an attempt at resurrection on a new disc. As borne out by the new recording, the authentic version is more colourful, more varied, has more contrasts, and is more operatic. While the previous versions opted for a *verismo*-styled treatment, now at last one gets the opportunity to judge the real merits of the opera, and place Erkel more accurately in the history of music. This is of great importance, even if one comes to acknowledge that in the original final scene the musical and dramatic invention lags behind that of the previous version: in this form the scene comes over ambiguously, as it uses less adequate means to convey a moving situation.

The revision of the libretto gives cause for less delight. The lines one hears are undoubtedly more singable and of a more natural prosody, but they mingle literary styles which do not quite harmonize.

This comparison of the authentic version with the "traditional" one, itself the fruit of a series of revisions, naturally prompts a comparison of the performance itself with earlier recordings: the 1956 Hungaroton recording conducted by Vilmos Komor (LPX 31054-55) and the 1969 one, under János Ferencsik (HCD 11376-77). Both were based on stage productions of the period, with casts considered to be ideal, and both abounded in "actualized motifs". Over the past century and a half, the 13th century story of the murder of a hated foreign ruler was often used to express hatred of foreign oppression and to refer to current social conditions. The Alpha Line recording lacked such a firm theatrical background. In the spring of 1993, the Hungarian State Opera commemorated Erkel once again with a revival of the Nádasdy–Oláh version, and its only new departure was that the production moved the setting to the 19th century.

Heading the Hungarian Festival Chorus (an ad hoc ensemble) and the Budapest Symphonists, Géza Oberfrank conducts Erkel's music with verve and empathy in a recording of high technical quality. The performance of the ensembles and soloists is not really fully mature, but it is effective in its informal spontaneity. The chorus, though of clear delivery, should have produced a more poised sound, and the orchestra more polished ensemble playing. The soloists, apart from the King, meet the musical demands on them with precision and devotion, but only a few of them—for example István Gáti as Tiborc and Éva Marton's imposing Queen—come close to the convincing, powerful renditions the great names of the older recordings provided their characters with. One probable reason for this is that there was hardly anyone who had the opportunity to live with their role on the stage for any length of time. The reliable Tamás Daróczi (in the part of Ottó) and Mihály Kálmándi (as Petur) are excellent. Ingrid Kertesi is a gifted, well-trained singer, but in the part of Melinda she is not really an adequate successor to the legendary Júlia Osváth. The character calls for a tragical bent and the part undoubtedly required a *lirico spinto* type soprano. Kertesi is a lyrical coloratura, and her voice is simply not where a considerable portion of the part would require it to be. The dramatic forcefulness is exhausting for her voice, which is perhaps why she was miked too closely, and in many places this led to edginess and distortion. There is good reason why Kertesi's Melinda and the listener feel happiest in the lyrical moments (Berceuse) or the coloratura runs of the first finale and the Mad Scenes. (As with many casts, here too, one feels a painfully missed opportunity: Ilona Tokody's artistry and her truly memorable Melinda have long cried out to be recorded.)

Éva Marton promised to be a sensation as Queen Gertrudis, the personification of foreign oppression. After her splendid Judit in Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, one placed great hopes in her ability to do well for the other important Hungarian opera. She did not let us down as regards dramatic force, but the great Wagnerian roles she has sung in the last decade have left their mark on her voice and breath control. At the time of the recording she was also singing Gertrudis on the Budapest stage and her vocal weariness could not be disguised. The spreading, edgy and wobbling top notes, the coarse middle and the colourless lower register made Gertrudis sound more vulgar and unremarkable, thus somewhat depriving her of her royal majesty.

The Budapest Opera has employed András Molnár in a wide variety of roles over the past fifteen years. His respectful and ambitious performance this time, too, is that of a kind of generalized "heroic" figure, and so the passion and suffering of his Bánk cannot really be distinguished in deportment, stance and tone from his Lohengrin, Don José or Radames. His voice is more robust but less bright at the top than it was formerly, and after some time it becomes tiring to listen to his dull and nasal middle register. This is perhaps why one gets the feeling that compared to the noble pathos of the superb Simándy and Ilosfalvy, Molnár is merely pathetic. The authentic Bánk needs real nobility in diction. And, of course, performance on stage would be required. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Oh, Distant Oleanna!

Howard Baker: *Scenes from a Beheading* • Dostoevsky: *The Uncle's Dream* • Bryusov: *Fiery Angel* • David Mamet: *Oleanna*

How can society respond to the challenges of art? Will it tolerate the artist who shows a picture that is not what society expects him to show? Is he considered a member of a minority and treated as an enemy, or is he looked upon as a buffoon to be held in profound contempt? For that matter is there any need today for subtlety in thought, for artistic sensibility: would it not be better for the artist to surrender autonomy and conform?

Some recent new Hungarian productions address at least some of these questions.

In Howard Barker's *Scenes from a Beheading*, the doge of Venice commissions the painter Galactia to represent the Battle of Lepanto, in which the Holy League of Venice, Spain, and Pope Pius V won a decisive victory over the Turkish fleet. As a realistic painter, Galactia paints a tableau depicting the horror of the massacre instead of an allegory of victory. The patron furiously rejects an approach that is in conflict with official perceptions; he has her imprisoned on the charge of betraying the republic, and gives the commission to a more tractable mediocrity, who also happens to be Galactia's lover. A lady, a critic close to those in power, explains to the doge that it is Galactia's brilliant painting that will represent Venice to history, and even in the present it is not dangerous, since those who see it will not understand it anyway. The tableau is put on show, Galactia is released from prison, and she is invited to the highest quarters.

Wrapped in this Renaissance mantle, the British playwright has written a contemporary English play, and this production of the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár has turned it into a contemporary Hungarian play. In Tamás Ascher's production, the doge proclaims sugary affection for his artists, as opposed to the cardinal, the true keeper of the state's conscience, who hates them ex officio, as otherwise he would not be fit for the function as censor in chief. The question is what independent artists (in this case a painter) can do if they neither want to paint pity for the dead (for the Church) nor victory (for the state). The answer is that they are either rejected or they accomodate themselves to what is needed. Barker treats the problem somewhat didactically, over-simplifying when he brings the adversaries to a rapid understanding that is both cynical and bitter in tone. His approach is the typical illusion of a middle-

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class liberal, namely that the ideologues of authority are interested in the aesthetic imprint they leave behind, and acknowledge, at least among themselves, what is valuable and what is not. Indeed, they are able to differentiate between the two. Apart from this charming West European naivety, *Scenes from a Beheading* is a good and clever play.

The Kaposvár production is truly brilliant. Tamás Ascher is unsurpassable in the way he can create a perfectly functioning production using a bare minimum of theatrical means, while what emerges onstage utilizes a maximum of acting power. Especially enthralling is Piroska Molnár as Galactia. She is able to put over something that is virtually impossible to express on stage, namely talent. Her Galactia, Rubensian as a figure (though not in style), whose work is never seen on stage, is the perfection of genius. The dreadful hands and distorted faces she has painted in her canvas of the Battle of Lepanto are reflected in her hungry look of longing to master life, in her relentless reasoning and sensuality, in the way she sizes up the model, and in a voluptuous and crude desire for justice. They are reflected in her conquering a rat-infested prison with a statue, that is a work of art, and in her smile as she listens to the remarks on her painting made by incomprehending viewers. Finally, there is her bitter grimace with which she tosses off a good many drinks before setting off for her own "execution", a reception given by the highest in the state. "Arriving" there would amount to conformity, which means death for an artist.

The Dostoevsky production at the Művész Szinház clearly bears out what happens when an artist—in this case the famous Russian director Anatoly Vasiliev—is not willing to conform. This production of *The Uncle's Dream* inspired a degree of indignation both on the part of audiences and critics. The reason for their indignation was that on the first night the production, proceeding slowly and breaking all the rules of psychological realism and the audience's customary expectations, went on until midnight. Or was this perhaps not the only reason?

Dostoevsky's story, "The Uncle's Dream", can be summed up briefly. Maria Alexandrovna Moskaliova wants to marry off Zina, her beautiful daughter, to the elderly prince K, not only said to be half-witted, but even an imitation of a man, moved by springs, with a limp and a glass-eye, wearing a wig and corsets, even if he does have some of the elegance of a man of the world. The wedding plan is on the verge of success when Mosgliakov, the prince's nephew, whom Zina has repeatedly rejected, makes the uncle believe that he has wooed the girl only in his dream, and so it all comes to nothing. There is also a poor, tubercular teacher, whom Zina loves; Maria Alexandrovna claims that he could be treated using the prince's money, that he could even marry Zina as soon as she is widowed, which presumedly will not be a long way off. Soon after the prince's proposal, which fails under scandalous circumstances, both teacher and prince die. In the epilogue to Dostoevsky's story, three years later Mosgliakov sees Zina again, now the beautiful wife of the governor, at a ball in the "remotest province". He stares at her for several hours, rather in the manner of Onegin, in a picturesque pose leaning against a column, and "a gloomy, abstracted expression, a grim, Mephistophelean smile never left his face throughout the evening."

The stage version takes in the material of the story by "reckoning with a director", whose principal aim is to leave much to the actor. Dostoevsky's dialogue, already long, becomes even longer, absorbing part of the narrative; allowing the actor to be on stage for an extended time, enabling

him to gradually build up his character. The most important element in the production is time—not the performance time of three and a half hours, which the first night audience, most of them theatre people, reacted to with hysterical intolerance, but the inner time, intended to allow the actor to inhabit the role. This is treated much more loosely than is customary, and the actor is compelled to fill in the frames at his disposal with his full personality.

In Vasiliev's production, psychological realism does not function in the traditional way, there is no cueing, nor are relations resolved in physical action and movement—such assistance is almost totally missing. Vasiliev's actors are left to their own devices (which does not mean that the director expects nothing of them, on the contrary, he knows exactly what he wants); in exchange they are granted absolute freedom which they are supposed to use to step up their intensity and lend intimacy to their presence. This can be dangerous, and if the actor is "empty", the result can be disastrous. If he is not, however, the acting presence is incomparably richer and more substantial than usual. The actor who seems to linger passively in his role, generates internal processes, but instead of building up a role, he pillories his own personality, uniting his intuition with the situation at his disposal—capturing his own self in the role as it were.

The fact that the director is still very much part of the performance is exemplified by the perfect construct which is the uncle. The long, black wig, the small pointed beard, the up-turned moustaches, the corselet operated by a lever, the thick gauntlet and the artificial leg correspond not only to Dostoevsky's description, but also to the "medieval knight" or "troubadour" at the back of the "idiot". The prince is both a "construction" and a person; it is bravura acting by Dezső Garas that allows him to present the two in one. Indeed, he manages even more: gallantry in simplicity, and an innocent, sensitive and vulnerable childish spirit, living his life as if in a dream, in the lisping parrot of a man, speaking in clichés, approvingly repeating of what others say. His opportunities for acting are greatly restricted: he enters, sits down in a chair, puts his left foot on a tiny foot-stool, and puts his right hand in his lap. From then on he remains almost motionless, at most giving orders for tea to be served with rapid head-shakes and goggling. Among ordinary people, behaving like puppets, Zina discovers something human in need of solace in this sad, ridiculous automaton. This is perhaps why she has agreed to the wedding, whose failure and the spectacle of the offended prince move her to a devastating soliloquy at the end of the play. In this last scene each of them has a copy of their part in their hands, not because they did not receive their texts in time for the rehearsals, as some naive theatre people thought, but because they have formally stepped out of their parts. "You are the only person here, with a moral sense," the actor in the part of the prince tells the actress in the part of Zina, almost in his own voice and leaves the stage without limping.

People cannot be taken for fools, Anatoly Vasiliev tells the public with this controversial production. The more torpid part of the profession and the audience was unable to swallow this unusual bite and it stuck in their throats. With the curtain rising on ten thousand occasions during a season, they have grown unused to the idea that, on some evenings, there is something happening as well.

The director Gábor Bódy, who committed suicide a few years ago, was a conspicuous type of the nonconforming artist. His films earned international and peer recog-

nition, but he took an interest in the stage only on exceptional occasions. The provocative *Hamlet* he directed was seen and has been remembered only by a few. Now some friends of his have staged a production in the Pécs National in his memory. This is based on a novel by Bryusov, for which Bódy once wrote a film scenario. The film was never made, and this stage adaptation was written by Vilmos Csaplár and János Szikora (who was co-director of the Bódy *Hamlet*).

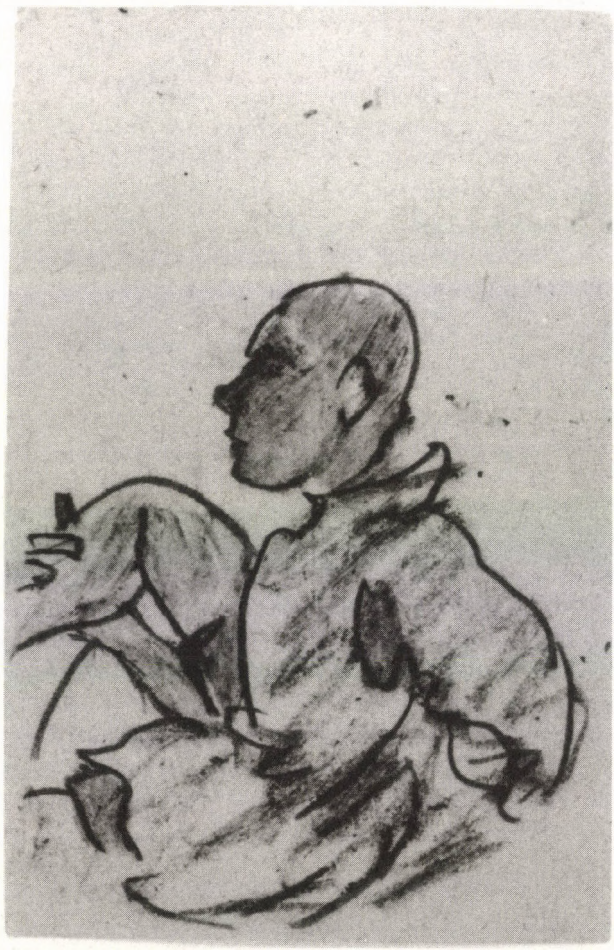
Fiery Angel, Bryusov's novel of 1908, is a major stylistic accomplishment, with its authentic medieval iconography and its pastiche of the narrative prose of one or two hundred years later. Bódy, however, was not concerned with this, rather with the irrational passion of modern man, flitting between heaven and hell; this appears in the character of the nun, Renata, the novel's heroine, who, for the sake of her love, wanders from Christian submission into the sacrileges of alchemy, magic and a witches' sabbath. Just as Bryusov wrote his own self into a character (or perhaps more) of the novel, so too has Csaplár's transcription developed, in way of a homage to the film scenario, which shyly preserves Bódy's personality. Embedded into a framework story, he redoubles the medieval plot and sublimates it into the imaginary story of the "film director"—Bódy.

The transferences, like some system of mirrors or a series of those Russian dolls that fit into one another, are too complex to lend themselves to easy analysis. Although the stage version includes some rough-and-ready features—for example, the framework story itself—it is well suited for a spectacle play. This is an area in which the director János Szikora is well tested. He has raised the seating at the two ends of the chamber theatre in Pécs, and has the medieval ritual—both Christian and satanic—played in the broad run built diagonally between them. The events in the private sphere take place on two stages, complete with sets on either side—the basic story from the Middle Ages on one, and the contemporary framework story on the other. The space in the middle presents a series of heightened pictures: a clerical procession, a hysterical band of nuns, satanic temptation (somewhat reminiscent of Kawalerowicz's *Mater Johanna* and Whiting's *Devils*), torture, penitence, crucifixion, witches' Sabbath, black magic. Szikora's theatre of spectacle involves fertile imagination and considerable professional skill. The vision of the performance is penetrating. Pure Spielberg, you might say, borrowed the closing effect of from Tony Kushner's play, *Angels in America*, when in a scintillating conclusion the fiery angel of the title comes to take away the protagonist. This "Annunciation" is also a final farewell to a successful alternative season in the chamber theatre of the Pécs National, now closed down by the management. This also allows a conclusion to be drawn about the likely fate of "elite" artistic attempts at a time when commercialism is gaining ground.

The Budapesti Kamaraszinház, a chamber theatre, staged David Mamet's two-handed *Oleanna* in its recently opened second studio. Even if the idea of "political correctness" has not yet really filtered through, the problem tackled in the play—the conflict between John, the university lecturer in his forties and Carol, his frustrated female student—does exist here, too. Here, too, there are many who, like Carol, see the "enemy" in the intellectual who uses "meaningless" foreign words. Despite being successful, with a good job, family and a fine home, John still indulges in being critical of, indeed "irregular" in the world to which he owes everything. We are defenceless, Mamet suggests, in face of the demagogic, feminist aggression at the back

of Carol's kind of plebeian generational class warfare. This he underlines by writing two endings to the play. In one, John knocks down and kicks Carol. In the other, Carol, after being kicked, puts a statement of apology before the professor for him to sign, together with a list of books which the students have decided to ban.

This Budapest production has a third ending in which Carol and John, while mutually exchanging slaps, defy each other like two enraged beasts. This version, invented by the director, Krisztina Deák, is—believe it or not—gentler than the other two, ordering a temporary halt in the duel—indicating that the game is not over. This is all the more justified since the hidden aggression that endangers the values of a liberal democratic society—the subject of the play—is for the time being somewhat less topical here, inasmuch we are only in the process of trying to build a liberal democratic society. This, however, does not detract from the merit of the production, one of the best in recent months. The sweet tune about the distant Oleanna, where you could live happily, occasionally floats in through the open window as the play proceeds. But, as they say, that's not our problem yet. ❧



The Media War helped people realize that in a democracy even he who holds the highest post is not an all-powerful monarch: he has some rights and does not have other rights. This must have been a pleasant and liberating surprise. People were able to witness, with a shiver, the fact that a simple citizen can stand up and say in public: "Mr Prime Minister, I have to tell you, with all due respect, that you are mistaken." And nothing happens. No siren-wailing police cars coming, no courts martial convening, no jail doors slamming. Nothing.

From: *Holding the Past: My Days as a Media Chairman* by Elemér Hankiss, p. 96.

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